91/49
c

91/49
c

The Bancroft Library

University of California • Berkeley

REGIONAL ORAL HISTORY OFFICE

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

ON THE WATERFRONT:
AN ORAL HISTORY OF RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA

Eddie Eaton

IN SEARCH OF THE CALIFORNIA DREAM:
FROM HOUSTON, TEXAS TO RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA, 1943

An Interview Conducted by
Judith K. Dunning
in 1986

Copyright © 1990 by The Regents of the University of California

EDDIE EATON

Photograph by Judith K. Dunning, 1986

This manuscript is available for research purposes. Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, 486 Library, University of California, Berkeley 94720, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

> Eddie Eaton, "In Search of the California Dream: From Houston, Texas to Richmond, California, 1943," an oral history conducted in 1986 by Judith K. Dunning, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1990.

Copy no. 1

Acknowledgments

The Regional Oral History Office, on behalf of future researchers, wishes to thank the following organizations whose contributions made possible this project, "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California."

The CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES, a state division of the National Endowment For The Humanities

Matching Funds

Chevron USA

Crowley Maritime Corporation

Moore Dry Dock Foundation

Mechanics Bank

Marco F. Hellman Fund

Kaiser Healthplan, Inc.

Bechtel Power Corporation

Friends of The Bancroft Library

The completion of the oral history volumes and their distribution to participating Bay Area public libraries was funded through a grant by the U.S. Department of Education under the provision of the Library Services and Construction Act administered in California by the State Librarian. The work was done in cooperation with the Richmond Public Library.

INTRODUCTION by Jim Quay

It is a great pleasure to introduce "On the Waterfront" to you. I myself was introduced to the project in September 1983, shortly after becoming executive director of the California Council for the Humanities. Both the Council and its mission of bringing the humanities to out-of-school adults were relatively new to me when Judith Dunning came to my office to talk about her proposal. Ms. Dunning wanted to document an important period in the life of the Richmond, California waterfront, but she didn't want to write a study for scholars. Instead, she proposed to interview most of the oldest surviving waterfront figures, collect historic photographs of the port and its workers, and to create from these an exhibit for the public. Would the Council be interested in supporting such a project?

Happily, the two dozen scholars and citizens who sat on the Council then were interested and, convinced of the project's importance, voted to fund Ms. Dunning's proposal in early 1984. Six years later, I now know what I couldn't have known then: that "On the Waterfront" had all the features of a typical public humanities project: a powerful subject, caring scholars, a resourceful and dedicated project director, and uncertain funding.

You can appreciate why even the best public humanities project--and "On the Waterfront" is one of the best--doesn't easily attract funding. In a state focused relentlessly on the future, the next quarterly statement, the next development, the value of such a project doesn't show up in a cost-benefit analysis. Who would care about the lives of Californians past? Who would care about a waterfront whose boomtime is passed?

The answer is: thousands of people, as Judith's project proved. First and foremost, Judith, who didn't just study Richmond, but moved to and lived in Richmond. Like so many project directors, she gave time and life to this project far beyond the amount budgeted. In the language of accounting this is called "in-kind contribution"; in the language of life it's called devotion. Those of us privileged to know Judith know that the project both exhausted her and enriched her, and she has won the admiration of those who supported her and the affection of those she has interviewed and worked with.

After Judith came a handful of interested scholars--historian Chuck Wollenberg, folklorist Archie Green, and oral historian Willa Baum--who gave their time and expertise to the project. Next, a handful of people at organizations like CCH, Chevron and Mechanics Bank, who thought enough of the idea to fund it. Finally, eventually, came the thousands of visitors to Richmond Festival by the Bay during 1985-87 and saw the photographs and read the excerpts from interviews and realized that they too cared about these people. And now, you, the reader of these interviews, have an opportunity to care.

In its fifteen years of supporting efforts to bring the humanities to the out-of-school public in California, the Council has seen two great themes emerge in the projects it funds: community and diversity. "On the Waterfront" embodies both. I think such projects are compelling to us because in our busy lives, we often encounter diversity more as a threat than as a blessing, and community more as an absence that a presence.

"On the Waterfront" gives us all a chance to experience the blessings of diversity. The life details that emerge from these pictures and voices make us appreciate how much the people of the Richmond waterfront are unlike us, how much attitudes, economies, and working conditions have changed. Yet because the portraits are so personal and intimate, we can also recognize the ways in which they are like us, in their struggles, their uncertainties, their pride, and their fates. What seemed like difference becomes part of a greater sense of who "we" are.

In the lives of waterfront people, we can also glimpse how a community grew and waned. Busy with our own lives, we often neglect the activities that knit communities together. Judith Dunning's project allows us to see what we are losing and how communities are created and destroyed. And so, "On the Waterfront" fulfills the oldest promise of the humanities: that in learning about others, we learn about ourselves. For the gift of these twenty-six lives, we can thank Judith Dunning.

Jim Quay
Executive Director
California Council for the Humanities

March 2, 1990
San Francisco, California

PREFACE

ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

"On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," began in 1985. Interviews were conducted with twenty-six Bay Area residents including early Richmond families, World War II Kaiser Shipyard workers, cannery workers, fishermen, and whalers.

I was first attracted to this shoreline industrial town located sixteen miles northeast of San Francisco in 1982 while enrolled in a documentary photography class. For ten weeks I concentrated on the Richmond waterfront, often accompanying the crew of the freighter Komoku on its nightly run from Richmond to C & H Sugar in Crockett. It was then that I began to hear colorful stories of Richmond's waterfront and the City's World War II days.

The question which captivated me in 1982 and still does is--what happened to Richmond when World War II transformed this quiet working class town into a 24-hour-day industrial giant? With the entry of the Kaiser Shipyard, the number of employed industrial workers skyrocketed from 4,000 to 100,000. An unprecedented number of women entered the work force. The shipyards set speed and production records producing one-fifth of the nation's Liberty ships. By 1945 Richmond's shipyards had launched 727 ships.

There were other enormous changes. During the wartime boom, Richmond's population rose from 23,000 to 125,000. The ethnic composition of Richmond and the entire Bay Area changed dramatically with the influx of workers recruited from the South and Midwest. There was little time to provide the needed schools and community services. Housing shortages were critical. Twenty-four thousand units of war housing were built but they were soon filled to capacity. People were living in make-shift trailer camps along the roadsides and the all-night movie theaters were filled with sleeping shipyard workers.

James Leiby, professor of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley, called Richmond a "spectacular" case of urban development. What happened to other communities over a period of decades occurred in Richmond in a few years.

Some of the questions I wanted to explore in the interviews were--who were these newcomers to Richmond and were there reasons, beyond the promise of a job, which brought them in steady streams by trains, buses, and automobiles hauling make-shift trailers? And was this destination of Richmond, California, all that they had imagined?

Other questions were just as compelling. After the war ended and Kaiser and fifty-five other industries moved out of Richmond, leaving this new population suddenly unemployed, what made people stay? And for those who left Richmond and returned home to their families in the South and Midwest, what made them come back to Richmond a second time, often bringing relatives with them?

As intrigued as I was by this new population, I also wanted to know how Richmond natives experienced these changes. In a sense, as others moved in to find new homes in Richmond, the longtime residents were losing their once small and familiar home town.

Initially, I tried to locate people who were living and working in Richmond before the World War II boom. They worked in the canneries, at the Chevron Refinery, or made their living fishing in San Pablo Bay. Most of these first interviewees were California natives, born and raised in Richmond. But the majority of the interviewees for this project came from other places--Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Iowa, Idaho, Utah--all to start a new life in California. Each one had a story to tell. Armed with a tape recorder, a camera, and lots of unanswered questions, I set out to record these local residents.

INTERVIEW SETTING

With few exceptions, the initial interview took place at the narrator's home. Because I was recording a diverse group, the interview setting varied dramatically. One day I might be in a neighborhood where residents, fearing stray bullets, keep their curtains drawn and their lights dimmed. Another day I would be in a home with a sweeping view of the bay, built by a former cannery owner during the Depression.

When possible, I recorded additional interviews and photographed at locations where the narrators had lived or worked. Some of these included the former Filice and Perrelli Canning Company, Ferry Point, Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor, and the last remaining World War II shipyard structures...since torn down. I also spent many days off shore. When interviewing Dominic and Tony Ghio, fishermen for over sixty years, I accompanied them on dawn fishing trips in San Pablo Bay. However, following a turbulent twelve-hour whale watching excursion to the Farallon Islands with former whaler Pratt Peterson, I vowed to continue my research on land.

When I asked some project participants to give me a personalized tour of Richmond to see what landmarks were important to them, all too often I was shown vacant lots where a family home, church, or favorite cafe once stood. The downtown, once bustling with movie theaters, dance halls, and department stores, is eerily quiet for a city of 82,000. I found that local residents are still angry over the loss of their downtown district during the 1960s redevelopment era. Longtime residents spoke emotionally of the city losing its center. Hilltop Mall, built on the outskirts of town and accessible by automobile, was no substitute for a shopping district in the middle of town. The struggle to rebuild the downtown and to attract new businesses is an ongoing one for the City of Richmond.

After the interviewing was completed, there were photo sessions in the narrator's homes and former work places, as well as meetings in which we went through family albums and trunks. Some wonderful photographs and the stories behind them were uncovered during this process. Copies are included in the individual volumes.

PUBLIC USES OF THE ORAL HISTORIES

From the early stages of this project, both the text from the oral histories and the collection of photographs, have been used in community events. Examples include photo panels and maritime demonstrations at Richmond's Festival by the Bay, 1985, 1986, and 1987; and Oakland's Seafest '87. An exhibition, "Fishermen by Trade: On San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers," produced in collaboration with the Richmond Museum in 1988, was developed from the oral history interviews with Dominic and Tony Ghio.

In an effort to present the oral histories to the public in a form which retained the language, the dialects, and the flavor of the original interviews, I wrote "Boomtown," a play about the transformation of Richmond during World War II. "Boomtown" was produced by San Francisco's Tale Spinners Theater and toured Bay Area senior centers, schools, and museums in 1989.

A new direction for the oral histories is in the field of adult literacy. Nearly fifty years after the recruitment of men and women from the rural South and Midwest to work in the Kaiser shipyards, some former shipyard workers and many of their descendents are enrolled in LEAP, Richmond's adult literacy program, where the students range in ages from 16 to 85 and are 70 percent black.

Our current goal is to make a shortened, large print version of the oral history transcripts for use by adult literacy students and tutors. We think that by using the true stories of local residents as literacy text, there will be an additional incentive for adults learning to read. The characters in the oral histories are often their neighbors, friends, and families speaking in their own words on such topics as the Dust Bowl, the World War II migration of defense workers, waterfront industries, family and community life.

THANKS

"On the Waterfront" project has had many diverse layers, including the University of California, the advisory committee, a wide range of financial supporters, and of primary importance, a large group of interviewees. I want to thank all of the project participants who donated their time, enthusiasm, and memories to this project.

Special thanks is due Jim Quay, Executive Director of the California Council for the Humanities, who has been a source of good advice and inspiration from the beginning. The Council's grant in 1984 got the project off the ground, kicking off the campaign for matching funds. Jim Quay's counsel last summer set in motion the completion of the oral histories by introducing me to the California State Library grant programs.

Bay Area historian Chuck Wollenberg and labor folklorist Archie Green have been my primary advisors, as well as mentors, from the early planning stages. Chuck provided insight into how Richmond's transition during World War II fit into the larger picture of California history. Archie Green reinforced my belief that as chroniclers of history we must continue to document the lives of working people.

From the preliminary research to the completed project, Kathleen Rupley, curator of the Richmond Museum, has been enormously supportive. Working in collaboration with Kathleen, and Museum staff Paula Hutton and Joan Connolly on the "Fishermen by Trade" exhibition was an invigorating experience as well as an excellent example of how two organizations pooled their talents and resources to create a popular community event.

Stanley Nystrom, a Museum volunteer and lifelong Richmond resident, has been a continuing resource to me. A local history buff, with a great sense of detail, he assisted me often.

Finally, I want to thank Adelia Lines and Emma Clarke of the Richmond Public Library, Sharon Pastori of the LEAP program, and Rhonda Rios Kravitz and Gary Strong of the California State Library for their support in making possible the completion of these oral history volumes and their distribution to several Bay Area public libraries which serve minority populations.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In my work I am most interested in recording the stories of people who are undocumented in history and who are unlikely to leave written records behind. For me, the strength of this project has been seeing the transformation in how the interviewees view their relationship to history. They came a long way from our first contact when a typical response to my request for an interview was, "Why do you want to interview me?" or "What's important about my life?" And "Why Richmond?" With some encouragement, many became actively involved in the research and the collection of photographs, and began recommending others to be interviewed. "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," became <u>their</u> project, with a life of its own.

This set of oral histories is by no means the whole story of Richmond. It is one piece of its history and one effort to generate community-based literature. I hope that it will encourage others to record the stories, the songs, and the traditions of our community members. They have a lot to teach us.

Judith K. Dunning
Project Director

February 23, 1990
Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library
University of California
Berkeley, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Eddie Eaton

I had read an article in a local paper about Mr. Eddie Eaton after he had renovated a Richmond apartment house, and I was impressed with his positive attitude about the city. I called him to ask if he might be interested in participating in the oral history project. He was, and we taped two sessions at his home in Richmond in February of 1986.

When I first met him, I could not believe that he was sixty-nine years old. In a white painter's jumpsuit and a bright red turtleneck, he was a striking man of over six feet tall who looked decades younger. Mr. Eaton, a golfer who can still be seen hitting golf balls on his lawn, was the winner of the First Open Golf Tournament for Colored in Houston, Texas, in 1942. The next year he left Texas for California to find work in the Kaiser Shipyards. He was accompanied by his "sweetheart," soon to be his wife and a Kaiser shipyard welder. Myrtle and Eddie Eaton have been married for forty-five years. They had three postwar babies, Eddie Jr., Margie, and Patricia, born in '45, '46 and '47.

Mr. Eaton was the only one from a family of five sons and one daughter to move West. Though his family later tried to convince him to return to his native Texas, Mr. Eaton knew that he had made a permanent move. As he told me during his interview, "It wasn't too long after I was here for me to make the decision that this was the place I was going to try to call home the remainder of my life. I had been all around. I had been in New York, Chicago, just name it, and Texas and Louisiana, and in and around. I've seen the way people live, and I see you have to live someplace, and I said, This is it. I'm at home here."

Soon after his arrival in Richmond, Eddie Eaton joined the Painters Union, local 560, and worked as a painter in the shipyards through the war years. After the shipyards closed, he continued in the trade at Bethlehem Steel in San Francisco's Hunters Point. He was a member of local 961 until his retirement in 1980.

During the first interview we talked about Mr. Eaton's family background in Texas, his Baptist upbringing, his early exposure to golf, and the World War II shipyard days in California. The second session focused on the postwar period.

The day before our scheduled second interview there was a message at my office from Mr. Eaton saying that he had gone over his notes and did not think he had anything else to add. When I called and talked to his wife she assured me that he was expecting me. Apparently, Mr. Eaton thought he might be taking too much of my time. I assured him that was not the case.

When I arrived in a downpour, he was waiting for me, and he asked that I not turn on the tape recorder. He proceeded to tell me one of the wildest murder stories I had ever heard, which had happened outside his front door. It was a lover's triangle ending in the death of one woman, her former husband, and the serious injury to her boyfriend. Mr. Eaton portrayed the woman as sweet, nice-looking, about "your size." He then described the rifle use to kill her saying, "That gun could kill an elephant or bear with one shot. He didn't need to shoot her four times."

The police, who later came and shot the gunman when he would not drop his rifle, were amazed that Mr. Eaton had witnessed the event so closely and had tried to intervene. He said that he never would have forgiven himself if he had not stepped in and tried to stop the violence. Other stories he told me off tape had to do with racial discrimination in the South. As soon as the tape was turned on, Mr. Eaton began painting a rosier picture.

While I do not think the full picture of Eddie Eaton comes through in his oral history, I do think one gets a glimpse of his strong spirit. He stands out as one of Richmond's biggest advocates. As he told me, "I know Richmond at one time was a small place. It wasn't a big name, or wasn't on the map at one time. But I hung right with Richmond and I've been here from the year '43 until now. Richmond is the place for me."

For a photograph, he asked that he be standing outside his meticulously-kept MacGregor home, which he bought in 1956, with his Cadillac in full view. The Eatons were the first black family to move into the neighborhood at 37th and Center Street. He explained that this would show how far he has come from being a seven-year-old boy earning his first thirty-five cents caddying on a Houston golf course. Mr. Eaton credits his mother, a widow left to raise six children, with teaching him valuable lessons, "I think that Mother did a good job. Like I say, up to this point I haven't been in nobody's jail one day...I know it just nothing but the good advice she gave me through the years."

Eddie Eaton's goals for his children are practical ones, "I just wanted them to be able to live a good life and be able to take care of themselves, support themselves, that's all." At the time of the interview, his son was employed as a painter, and his two daughters were in the field of education, one a school principal, and the other a teacher.

At the close of the interview, when I asked Mr. Eaton if there was anything else he would like to add, he replied, "No, just that the life I've lived up to this point, trouble I've always shunned that." Since his retirement, Mr. Eaton spends his time traveling with his wife, fishing, playing golf, and maintaining his home. On Sundays, he can be found ushering at St. John's Missionary Baptist Church in Richmond.

Judith K. Dunning
Project Director

February 23, 1990
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

Hi Judith,

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly or type. Use black ink.)

Your full name Eddie EATON

Date of birth 1-5-17- Birthplace OATES PRAIRE HOUSTON TEX.

Father's full name HUNTER EATON

Occupation LABORER Birthplace HOUSTON TEX.

Mother's full name Addie Byrd EATON

Occupation HOUSEWIFE Birthplace HOUSTON TEX.

Your spouse(s) MYRTLE EATON

Your children Eddie EATON JR. MARGIE FOURHAN[illegible] PATRCIA HOLDER

Where did you grow up? HOUSTON TEX.

When did your family first come to California? 1943

Reasons for coming WORK IN SHIPYARD #3 RICHMOND

Present community RICHMOND How long? 46 YEARS

Education (and training programs) 11th GRADE ARMY NCO

Occupation(s) PAINTER SUPERVISOR NOW RETIRED

continued on back page

Special interest or activities TRAVEL - IMPROVEING MY PROPERTY, GOLF FISHING VISHER INCHU FOR 15 YEARS

Ideas for improving Richmond's image Good place To LIVE

What do you see for the future of Richmond? Good TIMES

See you Judith,
I was glad to hear from you. We are doing fine praying that you are doing fine also
So long your as always
Eddie Eaton

TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Eddie Eaton

Family Background: Houston, Texas 1
Recollections of Mother and Oldest Sister 3
Grandfather, a Woodsman Who Lived to Be 115 6
Stories of Slavery 7
A Mother's Advice to Her Son 8
Father's Early Death 11
Religious Training: The Baptist Church 12
Family Activities: Fishing and Gardening 13
Childhood Home 13
Born in a Log Cabin 13
Household Chores 15
Education in Texas 16
First Money Ever Earned 17
Caddying at the Golf Course 17
Opening a Bank Account at Age Nine 19
Beginnings in Golf 21
The Texaco Country Club, Houston, Texas 21
Winner, Texas Open Golf Tournament for Colored, 1942 23
Blacks Breaking into Golf 25
Teenage Ambitions 28
Coming to Richmond from Texas, 1943 30
Expectations of California 33
Joining the Painters Union 34
Atmosphere in the Kaiser Shipyards 36
Governor Earl Warren on School Integration 37
Richmond's War Housing 38
Schedule at the Shipyards 40
Brickyard Landing 41
Wartime Transportation 43
Staying in Richmond 44
Closing Remark: First Session 47
Postwar Richmond 49
Support of Friends 52
Social Life During World War II and After 54
North Richmond Baptist Church 55

Local Blues Clubs 55
Membership in Organizations 57
Richmond Police Force 58
First Black Family in the Neighborhood, 1956 59
Tactics of Real Estate Brokers 61
Richmond's Image 64
Hard Times in Richmond 66
Improvements for the City 67
The Iron Triangle 68
Advice Passed on to Children 70
Interfaith Marriage: Baptist and Catholic 72
Special Ambitions 73
Suggestions for the Younger Generation 74

APPENDICES 78

Family Background: Houston, Texas

[Date of Interview: February 13, 1986] ##

Dunning: What is your full name?

Eaton: Eddie Eaton.

Dunning: What year were you born?

Eaton: January 5, 1917.

Dunning: Where were you born?

Eaton: Houston, Texas.

Dunning: How about your parents, do you know where they were born?

Eaton: Yes. In Houston also.

Dunning: How about your grandparents?

Eaton: They all were born around Houston, around in the vicinity. It's all Houston now.

Dunning: Did your parents ever talk about what life was like for them growing up?

Eaton: Well, they did. It was kind of struggling. They talked about it through the days and weeks and years. They talked about it as we grew up. As we were growing up with them they talked to us about how they took life and the problems they had, as everybody had.

This symbol indicates that a tape or segment of a tape has begun or ended.

Dunning: Did they ever tell you that your life was really different from theirs growing up?

Eaton: No. Life was just you could make the best of it, as they said they did. "We're going to have to make a way for ourselves and the things that we did and the things that we done, like schooling." One thing of the sort that was just going to prepare us for our future. Nothing unusual.

Dunning: Did you know your grandparents?

Eaton: Oh, yes.

Dunning: How would you describe them? Were there any ones that you were particularly close to?

Eaton: Well, we loved each other and were around each other all the time. We talked and communicated. We were with each other often.

Dunning: Did you live in the same house as some of your grandparents?

Eaton: They lived elsewhere. We lived a distance apart. It was not too far of a walking distance. We could walk that.

Dunning: Houston, is that where you grew up?

Eaton: Yes, I grew up right there, all my time.

Dunning: Could you describe what Houston was like when you were a child?

Eaton: I think it was far different than it is now. We went to school and did little chores as the kids do today. Nothing too much of a change then and today because you had things to do and you just had to do them. After we

Eaton: grew up we did little odd jobs to help like kids do today, lawns and things like that. It wasn't too much different than it is today.

Dunning: How many children in your own family growing up?

Eaton: It was six of us.

Dunning: Where were you in the family?

Eaton: I was fifth.

Dunning: So you were down at the end?

Eaton: [laughs] Down almost at the end. Yes, I was the fifth child.

Recollections of Mother and Oldest Sister

Dunning: Could you describe a typical day for your mother when all the children were living at home, things that you remember her doing the most?

Eaton: Oh, yes. She was a busy lady. The oldest one was a daughter. Mother had a daughter and five boys. Well, she had to work. She went out and did real jobs for the people that she knew. She would leave the daughter in charge. The daughter was just a mother. She'd whip me many a day, my sister did.

Dunning: So her daughter really was the second mother, if not the first.

Eaton: She was a second mother. Mother has passed on right now. I treat my sister just like I did my mother. I send her Mother's Day, Christmas, and birthday cards the same thing I did for mother. She's getting that

Eaton: same attention now that I gave my mother. The money and things that I sent my mother, she's getting it now. She was just my second mother, because she'd whip me many a day.

Yes, things I would do wrong as a kid, my sister said, "Don't do it." I would do it and boy I would be in trouble.

Dunning: That was quite a position for her in the family being the oldest girl with all those brothers.

Eaton: It was, that's right.

Dunning: She naturally fell into that role.

Eaton: Fell right into it. She's just like that now. We are all grown up and raised now, but right now Mother's gone, and she's just like another mother.

Dunning: How old is your sister now?

Eaton: She must be about seventy-eight or seventy-nine. She's up there pretty good now.

[tape interruption]

Dunning: What kind of work did your mother do outside the house?

Eaton: It was a house where she would go out to the people that she knew and she would work in their home, housekeeping, for the people who were able to pay.

Dunning: That was probably one of the few jobs available for--?

Eaton: That was just about one of the few jobs available, yes. That was just about it.

Dunning: Would your mother ever have to live in, or would she come home every night?

Eaton: She would come home to us every night.

Dunning: Who would do the cooking?

Eaton: My sister. My sister, like I say, she was just a second mother. She took care of business. It was no problem at all. We got along real well.

Dunning: How would you describe your own mother?

Eaton: Well, mother was a lady that had very good health. I thought she would live to be a hundred years old without a problem, she was so healthy. She used to run. It was a store, ABC Stores. It was a large chain of stores. They would have a picnic every year. They had different types of affairs--you know what I mean, races and things like that to compete with. Mother would run in what they consider the fifty-five and above race.

Just like the golfers today, the golfers fifty and up are senior citizens. So fifty-five and up was considered the old women's race. It was no problem. Mother would win that every year. I would put everything I had on a nose because she would win it every year. She could run.

I remember when we were coming up we would do the little things that kids do, mischief, and she would tell us not to run. Don't run from her. You're in trouble if you run because there was no way to outrun her. I mean there wasn't a one of her kids that could outrun her. You just don't run. You just take your punishment because if you run she was going to double it up. So running wasn't going to help you.

Grandfather: A Woodsman Who Lived to Be 115

Eaton: Mother was in very good health and I thought she would go to live a hundred years easy, without a problem. Her father lived to be a hundred and fifteen.

Dunning: That's pretty amazing. Did he stay in Texas until he died?

Eaton: In Texas, yes.

Dunning: What do you attribute his longevity to?

Eaton: I don't know. Grandfather kept busy. He would go every day. He was a woodsman, a timberman. He would get wood and he would go out and he would sell the wood to the people and stay busy every day and smoke his pipe. He smoked his pipe until he died... smoked an old cob pipe until he passed on. He just kept busy. He was just happy go-lucky, seemed to have been kind of a joyful type of guy and very friendly and easy to get along with, and he just lived a long life.

Dunning: I'm sure he was the longest living member in your family.

Eaton: He was, yes.

Dunning: Did you ever talk to him about his childhood?

Eaton: We would talk. We would talk slavery. He would remember. He would recall the days of slavery. He was born in and around Houston. It was on the outskirts, but like I say, Houston has extended out that far now. So he was born a native of Texas.

Stories of Slavery

Dunning: Do you recall any stories that he would tell you about slavery?

Eaton: Yes. The same old story, you know, about the way he had to work. He had to work and there was no such thing as an eight hour day. You worked until the job was completed. It was just about the same old story. Not too much freedom. That's about all that he would talk about, just the same old story. I know you've heard it many times. He said like the eight hour day, there was no such thing as an eight hour day. It was just if you had something to do or should do, you finished that.

Dunning: Did your grandfather ever talk about what he did immediately after emancipation?

Eaton: Well, he just began to try to make a way for himself in the best way he knew how. He married and had a family and just went on his merry way towards making a living the best way he knew how. But he made it real good, lived a good life. He owned property, had property of his own, his home, in his lifetime. He seemed to have been a happy go-lucky old man. I guess that was a treasure to him living the long life that he did.

Dunning: That's pretty amazing. One hundred and fifteen.

Eaton: A hundred and fifteen he lived to. And he was within his right mind when he passed on. His mind was good. Sometimes your mind leaves you and you stop thinking, you can't remember. But Grandfather seemed to admire me. He loved me, thought a lot of me, and even when I came West before he passed on, Mother said he would ask about me all the time, saying, "How's Eddie doing?"

Eaton: I was out in California, but he said, "How's Eddie doing?" He would ask about me all the time.

Dunning: Was he ever able to come out here and visit?

Eaton: No, he never did visit. He never did come this way. He would have if it just would have got into his mind. He would have come this way. He was quite a fellow.

A Mother's Advice to Her Son

Dunning: Your mother, do you feel that there are certain things that she tried to hand down to you?

Eaton: Mother, she gave me a lot of good advice. I remember when I was a youngster. From a child I have a picture there now. I look at it a lot of the time. I just look at it and say, "Thank you mother for the good advice that you gave me on my way up."

She taught me to try to, if I made any money, accomplished anything, try to protect some of it and save some of it. I remember, and my wife, she'll tell you this. She called me, said, "You were your mother's little lord Jesus." [laughs]

It was strange around eight or nine. Mother, she always picks one out of the family that she seemed to go with or trust. We've done that with the three kids we have here now. We let one of them in on more than the others. It's just one of those things that is the way the thing goes.

I know when things was rough and we went to work--maybe I'm getting too far ahead with the story. We went to work for the Texas Oil Company. They moved into the area within about a mile of where we lived.

Eaton: After the boys got up of age, the company decided they would just pick up the five of us boys. They said they would just pick that group of boys up. They're young, and let them grow with this golf course. That's just what happened.

We worked and worked and worked, and the money would come in and we would all bring the money and give it to Mother. Mother was just as good as the bank. She would put the money away, and that money grew. At one time it was $2,500. That was a lot of money, a whole lot of money.

Dunning: Was this in the thirties or late twenties?

Eaton: I would say in the thirties.

Dunning: During the Depression--that's a lot of money.

Eaton: That was a lot of money. This money was in the house. As I told you on the telephone the other night--the banks had gone broke. There was a risk to think about the bank. The people that had money in the bank, they would go to the bank and ask for their money, and they said, "Sorry, but the money's gone."

Mother feared the banks so she had this money in a trunk. I remember it just like yesterday. It was a little tin can about two or three inches square. She had this money in a tin can in the trunk. I think of how it is now, but there wasn't too much robbery then. I was the only one in the house at nine years old who knew where that money was.

She told me, "Son, look here. Safe in the can, here's the money." I'm nine years old.

Dunning: That's pretty amazing considering you were the second youngest also.

Eaton: Yes. Nine years old. Then Mother had an old stocking. She would keep a certain amount of money around her waist. She would say, "If anything ever happens and I get sick or anything. Around my waist I have some money." I'm the only one that knew that. Isn't that amazing? I was nine or ten years old.

Dunning: Why do you think she chose you?

Eaton: I don't know. You tell me and I'll tell you.

Dunning: Sort of an intuitive sense that she had?

Eaton: I guess. But I never gave her any trouble. I was a little nice guy, I would say, and I would always sit and talk with her. I loved to talk with her, and she would talk with me. We would just have our little conversations. She just seemed to, from the ideas and the mind that I had, and the way we communicated with each other, she seemed to kind of lean towards me for some reason. And that's the way it went. So we had a good time together and she put a lot of trust in me. I never did let her down, no.

Dunning: That's something to be proud of.

Eaton: Oh, yes. When she passed on I never had anything in my mind to be sorry for that I did to contribute to her death. I tried to do everything I had to do. I tried to keep everything going in the right direction so she wouldn't get any kind of a funny report of me since I was out West. That's just the way I lived. I loved her and we got along real fine. I don't know, like I said, what caused her to turn to me to cut me in on all that information like that, but she did.

Father's Early Death

Dunning: You mentioned that your father died when you were quite young. Do you have any recollections of him?

Eaton: I do. I remember him real well. The last thing he purchased for me was a little red wagon. You know, a little old red wagon, you see. It was a nice little red wagon. It was the last thing he purchased for me. I remember this real well.

And he died. I think he died from hard work. The life was rough there. Men, sometimes, worked from daylight until dark and over into dark. Healthwise, I don't know actually what was wrong with him. I think he just worked himself down.

Dunning: What was his job?

Eaton: He was a worker on roads, building roads.

Dunning: A laborer?

Eaton: A laborer, let's call it a laborer.

Dunning: He must have been a pretty young man when he died.

Eaton: Oh, he was. I can't recall just how old he was now, but he was quite young when he passed on.

Dunning: Do you feel that there are any things that you've learned from your father?

Eaton: Well, no. I was so young and I was small. I just would see him and we were around each other for quite a while after I got up old enough to remember anything. There wasn't too much I know on my father, no. But I can remember. I can remember him real well. I can

Eaton: remember he rode a horse all the time. I could see him going and coming to and from his destination. That's about all. Of course at five you're not too observant.

Religious Training in the Baptist Church

Dunning: Was religion an important part of your childhood?

Eaton: Yes. We are Baptist. I was baptized when I was about nine or ten years old. I was baptized in the Baptist church when I was about nine or ten. So we were in the church all the way. Mother, she taught us right from wrong as youngsters. We would go to church and she trained us and taught us that going to church was the right way. The church was right in our family.

Dunning: Did you continue in the Baptist church when you moved out to California?

Eaton: Oh, yes. I'm an usher in the church now. I'm an usher in the St. John Baptist Church right now.

Dunning: So that's something that has continued?

Eaton: I stayed right with it.

Dunning: Have you seen a lot of changes in the church since you were young?

Eaton: It seems like I haven't seen too many changes. I've gone to different denomination churches, but it seems like they all are going down the same highway. From the time I was in the church, even as a youngster in Houston, our church seemed to just talk about the same thing. The Lord Savior Jesus Christ. It's the same story. They tell the same story. I haven't seen a lot of change myself.

Dunning: And you're an usher now?

Eaton: I'm an usher. I've been an usher for eight years, yes.

Family Activities: Fishing and Gardening

Dunning: Were there activities that your family did together besides going to the church?

Eaton: Well, there wasn't a lot of things to do. I mentioned about the little sports events and the running. But it was mostly fishing and gardening. Mother had a garden every year, a beautiful garden.

Dunning: Vegetables?

Eaton: Vegetables, watermelons. We would grow watermelons up to forty-five, fifty pounds. She loved that. She had a garden every year. We had about an acre of ground or better. That helped us along, to help us to survive, that garden. We had fruit trees. We even had quite a few fruit trees, and all that came right in line with our lives.

Childhood Home

Born in a Log Cabin

Dunning: Could you describe your house that you grew up in?

Eaton: Oh, yes. Well, I can say I was born in a log cabin.

Dunning: You were?

Eaton: Born in log cabin. Later on we built a home--like I say, we went to work for the Texas Oil Company and the money was coming in. We built a nice frame home. We demolished the old log house. I remember that. That kind of stayed with me through the years.

Dunning: How old were you when that second house was built?

Eaton: Let's see now just how old I was. I must have been ten or eleven years old, I guess, twelve. I guess in the neighborhood like that, ten, eleven, twelve.

Dunning: Were you actually born at home in the log cabin?

Eaton: I was born at home, yes.

Dunning: Did your mother ever tell you stories about that?

Eaton: Well, yes. I know the kids were in grade school, the ones that were older than me, so the one that was around home, he wasn't in school yet, but he ran to tell the kids that Mother had a little baby. She was telling the news to the kids that were coming home. That's about all.

Dunning: Did your mother have a midwife?

Eaton: Yes, a midwife. Aunt Sally was her name. She lived to be about a hundred years old.

Dunning: Was she the midwife of that area or was she actually your aunt?

Eaton: No, she was the midwife for the area. She delivered many a child. Old midwife, that's what she was. She delivered many a child in her day. If someone would become in need for delivery they would go look for her. She was the one. Any hour of the night she was ready to act as a doctor. Funny thing is she did a good job. I never did know her to lose a child.

Dunning: I was going to ask you that. Your mother had six children all together?

Eaton: Six of them, yes.

Dunning: Did she have any children that died?

Eaton: No, but since we've been up now two of the kids have passed on. Two brothers are gone.

Dunning: Two of your older brothers?

Eaton: My younger brother, the one under me, and the one above me. Jesse and Lester.

Household Chores

Dunning: You mentioned before that you had some household chores as a child. What were they?

Eaton: Around the home? Well, I would have like the wood. We would have to bring in so much wood. Then around the garden we would have little chores about working in the garden and things of that sort. There wasn't too many things to do, but just like bring wood in and then we worked in the garden. There was that much land. We had quite a bit of it so it had to keep us kind of busy. That's about all. There wasn't too much to do.

Dunning: Did that gardening stay with you? Have you had gardens?

Eaton: Every year. I don't think I've missed a year since I've been in the state, and I've been in the state forty-three years. I don't think I've missed one year without having a garden. Isn't that something?

Eaton: I have a beautiful garden every year. Tomatoes, cucumbers, string beans. Just name it.

Education in Texas

Dunning: I really want to hear your golf story, but before that I would like to hear about your education.

Eaton: I got all of my schooling in Texas. I cut my schooling shorter than I really wanted to, but I did so to help my brother, my younger brother. He went on to college and graduated from college and he was a coach.

He was a football coach for one of the larger schools in Texas for twenty-five years. Phyllis Wheatley, and another school. I went to cut my schooling short to help him so it worked out real good.

Dunning: When you say you cut it short, how many years was that?

Eaton: I actually didn't graduate from high school. I did so to help him. He would write to me for money just as if I was his father. My father was gone, see. So we got along real well. He loved me for that and that worked out real good. We just worked as a team. We were a family. You know what I mean. Anything we could do to help each other, that's what we did.

Dunning: Do you have any special memories of the school that you went to in Houston?

Eaton: Nothing special, no.

Dunning: I just wonder how many children were in the classroom, and were they all from the same neighborhood?

Eaton: Well, yes, I would say. The school, they tried to have the kids in school within the closest range that they could, keep them from going walking. They tried to have the school where the children in the surrounding area wouldn't be too far away. So it worked out real good.

First Money Ever Earned

Caddying at the Golf Course

Dunning: You told me about how you began in golf on the telephone. I would really like to record that story.

Eaton: I can begin by telling you about the first money I ever earned.

Dunning: That's a good start.

Eaton: As I say, when I was a youngster--seven years old--I was walking down through this golf course, into the area where the golf course was. It was late. A woman asked me, "Son, do you want to caddy?"

I said, "Yes, ma'am." I was very polite, you know what I mean. "Yes ma'am." Mother, she taught us real good for that. She taught us the right way the best she knew how, and her way was good.

So this was my first time ever caddying. I went along with the lady. She had a little golf bag. The golf bag I have now I can put about five or six or seven or eight into my golf bag. I went around with her.

Eaton: When we got around to the end of the nine holes--it was just a nine hole golf course--she gave me thirty-five cents. I'll never forget that's the first money I ever earned in my lifetime, a quarter and a dime. I thanked her for it.

I was about a mile from my home. I ran from the time she gave me that thirty-five cents until I got home. I was afraid to put the thirty-five cents in my pocket because running I thought the money may jump out and I would lose it. So I held the money in my hand all the way. When I got home I couldn't hardly open my hand because my hand was cramped tight. But I got home and I had my thirty-five cents.

I told Mother. I said, "Mother, I've made some money." Big deal. "I've made some money." The first money I ever earned in my lifetime.

She said, "Really?"

So I had to explain to her. I showed her thirty-five cents. She admired it and she praised it. She knew how to praise me for trying, for my starter, you know.

That was the beginning of me knowing anything about golf. From that time I would caddy. I learned more about it and I caddyed for those people who were able to hire a caddy. I saved up twenty dollars above the money that we would give Mother. They would give us a dollar, a dollar and a half.

Sometimes you find golf balls that they lose. Somebody would lose a golf ball and you would find it and somebody would buy it from you. But I saved up twenty dollars. I told Mother that I wanted to put my twenty dollars in the bank. I had to twist her arm to agree.

Opening a Bank Account at Age Nine ##

Eaton: I said, "Mother, I have twenty dollars."

She said, "Son, what did you say?"

I said, "I have twenty dollars." But it's twenty dollars she didn't know anything about. Quarters, dimes, whatever, until I approached the twenty dollar mark. So I said, "But I want to put it in the bank." In caddying I heard the golfers, people I was caddying for, talking about the bank. The interest then was one and one-half percent. I would hear them talking. I had big ears. One and one-half percent, that's what the banks were paying. But your money was in a safe place then. The banks were safe, so they said. I figured that if it was good enough to hold that money, it was good enough to hold my twenty dollars, too.

Mother finally agreed for me to go ahead and put the money in the bank. She didn't think much of it, but she said just for me, if I wanted to try it, give it a try. So my older brother and I, we went down to the National Bank of Commerce. I had one of the change bags.

The National Bank of Commerce in Houston, Texas was a large bank. You walk in on Marlem Street and you walked out on Travis Street. We walked in and stood in the bank, just stood. Me and my brother in the lobby there. The teller, one of the ladies at the bank, came to me and asked me. She said, "Son, what can we do for you?"

I said, "I want a bank book." That's all it is is I want a bank book. I just want a bank book, period.

Eaton: She said, "Son, do you have any money to put in the bank? Do you have any money to obtain a bank book?"

I said, "Yes, ma'am."

She said, "How much money do you have?"

I said, "I have twenty dollars."

She said, "You have twenty dollars?"

In about a minute everybody in the bank, I think, was around me. They said, "What gave you the idea you want to put the money in the bank?"

I just repeated, "I want me a bank book."

So they said, "Well son, we're going to give you a bank book." The president of the bank, big Ben Garrett--he was the president. I used to caddy for him. He was there, plus all the tellers and the assistants. So they gave me a bank book, and from that time on I've been banking. From the time I was nine up until now.

Dunning: You must have been an unusual customer being a nine year old black boy.

Eaton: That was a rare situation. They just couldn't believe what they were seeing. They couldn't believe it, and they were so amazed. They loved that, you know. They all loved it. They were just as nice as they could be. In the South. As you say, you heard the stories of the South, but I could never forget those people were just as nice as they could be. There was nobody in the world who could have been any nicer and work with me, helping me, and gentler than they did.

Dunning: Say that again.

Eaton: Worked with me more gently. You know what I mean.

Dunning: Oh, gently.

Eaton: Yes. Trying to assist me in what I had in mind. It turned out real fine. But all this was the saving, trying to save a dollar as I mentioned earlier. Mother always said, "If you make any money, try to save a dollar because one day you'll need it. You make a hundred dollars and spend a hundred, it doesn't make too much sense."

Mother said, "Make a dime, try to save a nickel if you can." That was one of her ways of trying to give us good advice, about trying to have a dollar in case we would ever need one. From that day on I've been trying to save. I don't have much money, but I'm not broke.

Dunning: That's quite a lesson that she taught you.

Eaton: I love her for it today. I look at her picture sometimes and I'm just thinking. My wife tells me, "You just won't let your mother go, will you?"

I say, "No. As long as I live I'll just look at her picture and thank her for the good advice she gave me as a child."

Beginnings in Golf

The Texaco Country Club, Houston, Texas

Dunning: Was the golf course close by to your home?

Eaton: About a mile.

Dunning: What was the name of that?

Eaton: The Texaco Country Club. It belongs to the Texas Oil Company. They called it Camp Beaty. Camp Beaty, that was the name they gave the golf course. As I say, my brothers were all there. They saw us as just a group of boys there, strong boys.

Dunning: Were you the first one in your family to caddy?

Eaton: No. My brother was older than I was. As we grew up old enough to do a man-size job they hired us to maintain the golf course. That's how we managed to get our money to survive. So we lived good. I remember in 1926 or 1927 we bought a brand new Model T Ford, brand new. Brand new--$675.

Dunning: All the boys?

Eaton: The boys, the mother. You know what I mean. Mother agreed for it. The money was coming in. The older boys, they were making money at this golf course and we bought a spanking brand new Model T Ford, $675. Brand spanking new.

Dunning: That must have been quite an event.

Eaton: That was quite a day. Brand new car. We lived real good from, as I say, we got old enough to try to help Mother. She took good care of us the best she could after Father died. When we got old enough to try--as I say, when I was seven years I started trying to help, and the brothers older than me were helping, so we made it real fine. With the advice she gave us we lived a very good life.

Dunning: Were you and your brothers the only ones that were maintaining the golf course?

Eaton: My family was the only one maintaining the golf course, yes.

Dunning: Were you the only blacks at the golf course?

Eaton: We were the only blacks at the golf course, maintaining the golf course here. The family was large enough to cut the grass and to cut the greens and to do the things to be done at the golf course to maintain it. They were just tickled to death to have a young family to grow with the golf course.

The golf course was just put in there, about a year, a year and a half, something like that. So they just picked up the family, the youngsters, and we grew right with the golf course. It helped us. They were proud of it and it helped us so much. It made things so nice for Mother, too. So we lived a good life.

Winner, Texas Open Golf Tournament for Colored, 1942

Dunning: When did you start learning golf?

Eaton: Well, there was a guy they called Jack Lawler. He was a very good friend of mine. He was a friend of mine and he just kind of loved me. It seemed like he was nothing but love from a child. So he gave me some golf clubs, and around nine I started playing, hitting golf balls.

As I grew up into a teenager I was playing a pretty good game of golf. They would let me hit balls all the time. I hit the ball so good they let me hit balls, asked me to hit golf balls. I would show them how to hit the ball. I hit the ball better than they could hit it as a teenager.

Eaton: I went on to, in 1942, I won what they call the Texas Open Golf Tournament for Colored. That was really a rare thing. We had a gallery of probably three thousand people. That was a big day that day. I won that tournament in 1942.

Like I say, I could play the game. I knew how the game was played, and if I had had a chance in my heyday, when I was in my twenties, I could have been with Jimmy Demeritt and Jack Burke and all those guys, those pros. But they were there. Jimmy Demeritt and Jimmy Demeritt's brother, they were right there to watch this tournament that I was playing in.

If I had had a chance to break into the big time I would have had my money. My money would have been right. I could play right with the best of them. They enjoyed it though, and they were there from the time the tournament started until it ended. These were the pros, the big pros. You might recall Jimmy Demeritt, Jack Burke and those guys. They were all the pros of along about that time.

From there on I came out here, and like I say, I won--I've got some pictures here if you'd like to look at some of them. I'll show you one.

That's my last day on the job at Bethlehem Steel. Lucius Bateman's First Testimony Tournament. The championship, I won that.

Dunning: When was that?

Eaton: That was in '62. That was in Hayward, California. I was runner-up many a time. I've been right on top of everything through the years in golf, but I worked and I didn't have time to just really put a lot into it like you need to to be the top flight golfer. But I played a lot of good golf in my lifetime.

Eaton: I go out right now and with just a little practice, I can hit the ball just about as good as anybody. That's about the way it all started. It started right there. I started in Texas. I used to work for a man called Doc Selleman.

He would let me be away from the job sometimes to take his little son out of about ten or eleven, to help him and instruct him to play golf. Through the years he came on to be a pro. I did a beautiful job in helping him and he became one of the pros. He played a good game of golf.

Doc Selleman was rich. He would let me go out and, "Eddie, how did he do today?" So I always had to bring some kind of good reports, so the boy went on to make a real good golfer. He's really my buddy today. His father has passed on, but I see him when I go to Houston and we have a good time together. We're just like real good friends.

Blacks Breaking Into Golf

Dunning: When I think of golf I think of it as being establishment and a really hard sport to break into, particularly for a black person.

Eaton: Now it's no problem, but at that time we just played for the fun and enjoyment, but as far as breaking into the big time, it was out until this Charles Silford. He was the first black ever to break into big time golf. Since then it's been wide open for anybody that could qualify, no problem. Calvin Pete, I know you've seen him. He's dynamite. He is really one of the better golfers in the game today. Like I say, if you qualify now, the youngsters or anyone else that qualifies, black or whatever, has a chance.

Dunning: But what about some of the restrictions at the clubs. Even now in Oakland there's a problem.

Eaton: Yes, that club there now. They're trying to get that straight. I think that's all going to be eliminated, but you do have some private clubs where things are not right yet. But I think in time it's going to be okay. Just like this right here now, Joe Morgan and the group. I think that that's just about squared away. I think it's going to be all right. That's going to be where you can play there without a problem now. In time it's going to work out. But there has been some clubs around that are what they call private, and that's what they mean, is private. But I think all that's going to be eliminated in the near future.

Dunning: I'm curious if you knew from a really young age that you might not be able to be the greatest golfer because you were black. Did you understand that as a child?

Eaton: No, it didn't bother me too much. I didn't think too much about it because I knew at the time, I knew how things were. I figured some day it may happen, but I just didn't worry too much about it, no. It just didn't bother me too much. I though one day it would work out. And it did.

But in my heyday, as I say, I had no chance, no chance at all, to break into big time golf. But I could really play the game just about as good as those fellows could play it. But like I said, there was just no chance then. Right now anyone that can play the game has a chance, just like Calvin Pete. He came up and he's out there now. The boy, he's making just thousands and thousands of dollars. He's going to pass a million in a little while.

Dunning: It seems like Calvin Pete would be a strong role model for a lot of youngsters growing up.

Eaton: He is, yes.

Dunning: Did you ever have any kind of a model like that? A sports hero?

Eaton: Well, like I say, in golf I played a good game of golf and would challenge practically anybody in my day. But as far as breaking into the pro ranks then, I figured there was no way at the time. I knew there was no way at the time, so I just said wait until time permitted these things to happen, which is here now.

Dunning: How did it change? When you came to California, were you able to play golf?

Eaton: Oh, yes. We played it no problem. We played on any course we wanted to around the Bay Area. There were still private courses, but Alameda municipal courses, there was a group of those. We could play at Berkeley, Alameda, and even San Francisco in places. There were a lot of golf courses we could play without a problem so we just had a good time. No problem at all being able to play golf and when we wanted to play.

Dunning: It's just that you couldn't become a pro?

Eaton: No, no. That was out. That was out until Charlie Silford. I don't remember what year it was now. He was in San Francisco. He was the first black to break into pro golf.

Dunning: What decade was that?

Eaton: That's what I'm trying to think now. I would say that was in the late fifties. Since then everything has been moving along quite well.

Teenage Ambitions

Dunning: As a teenager, did you have certain ambitions or visions that you imagined your life would be like? Did you ever think what your life would be like down the road?

Eaton: Yes. I always had in mind to advance and to elevate myself within any ways and means that I could in my lifetime to go forward. I always wanted to go farther. I never wanted to just stay in one place. I wanted to keep moving, prosper in some ways and means. And I have. Truly, yes I did just that. Like I say, I resolved that anything that I attempted to do I try to do to the best of my ability. Everything seems to have worked out quite well. Just like on this job that you read in the paper there. I went over there as a painter.

Dunning: At Bethlehem Steel?

Eaton: At Bethlehem Steel, yes. They saw that I knew what I was doing and was a good mechanic. They themselves, they asked me. I didn't ask them for the job as boss. They asked me to become one of the bosses. So you see that. From that time on--like I say, I remained there thirty years as one of their bosses on this job. Then I retired in 1980. They didn't want me to go when I left. They said, "You're too young. Why are you going at this age?"

I told them my home here is paid for, and I figured thirty years, that's a long time to work with a group of people. I decided I would leave and let someone else give it a shot.

Dunning: Are you able to play more golf now?

Eaton: Yes, but it's kind of an unusual thing that's happening right now. I am able to play golf now, and I don't play as much as I could play. I have this little place here and I try to keep the lawn and things up. When you're up to maintain a home, it's quite a little job. Your lawn, and like I say, I garden every year in both places. I have a place here and a little place where I remodel over there.

Then I like to go fishing and riding. We get in the car and we go riding. We like to travel quite a bit. Golf, I just play golf kind of spotty. But I love it, yes. So me and my wife there, we take little trips. We just love to travel. It's about time, so since I retired--she retired also--and we're just having a good time. We're just having a super time. We were in Canada.

Dunning: This picture here?

Eaton: Yes. We were in Canada.

Dunning: Is this your granddaughter?

Eaton: That's my granddaughter, yes. You see the place? That's the place there.

Dunning: This is the building that you remodeled?

Eaton: That's the place I remodeled, yes.

Dunning: You did a good job.

Eaton: You see it before. That's before. I'd like for you to see the place now in person.

Dunning: This is very smart of you to take these polaroids, because no one would have believed the conditions. How long a project was it?

Eaton: I started it and completed it within about four months.

Dunning: That short?

Eaton: Within about four months, yes. That's a fruit tree I have on the place. That's a plum tree there that's just beautiful. That's the front of it in color, see, a plum tree. That's the same place you're looking at in the paper there.

Dunning: You did a nice job.

Eaton: Yes. It came out real nice, so the officials of Richmond told me, "You took your cash money and took over a house and made it look like that. We got to put it in the paper and let the people know who did the job." It worked out real nice. This Mayor Corcoran, you might recall him.

Dunning: Yes.

Eaton: He had told me, "We have to let the people know who did the job. You take over a house like that and upgrade Richmond like that, we have to let the people know." That's how it all happened.

Dunning: That was quite an example.

Eaton: Yes, it was.

Coming to Richmond From Texas, 1943

Dunning: Before we get into the present time, I would like to talk about the circumstances that brought you to Richmond in the first place.

Eaton: Well, I was drafted in the army in 1943.

Dunning: Were you married at that time?

Eaton: I wasn't married, no. I went to the army in early '43. I became a non-commissioned officer. I became an MP, MP duty, so I was traveling all over the country, New York, Chicago, just name it, traveling, transporting prisoners around.

I got into a little scrimmage and I got injured. The injury caused me to be discharged. It came to a discharge, honorable discharge.

I was discharged in Oregon. With a mind to help the war--it was in the war--I said, "This has happened, so I have to do something to try and help." It was a problem. It was a great problem, the war and all. I heard about the shipbuilding.

Dunning: Do you remember how you first heard about it?

Eaton: Yes, a friend of mine. It was a lady called Priscilla. I came to a friend of mine, Priscilla. She was telling me about the shipyards, and the pay was better than the pay in Texas. It sounds awful funny, but the pay here was $1.20 an hour. But I was making eighty cents in Houston. I said, "My goodness." That's forty cents more than I was making in Houston, so I gave it a shot.

Me and my wife, we weren't married. We were sweethearts in Houston. I went to Houston and picked her up and so we came this way. We stopped in Richmond in late 1943. We've been here ever since, forty-three years.

Dunning: How did you get here?

Eaton: On the train.

Dunning: Did you bring much luggage or things with you?

Eaton: Not too much. We didn't bring too much, just enough to kind of tide us over, that's it. A few clothes that we had. No, there wasn't too much to bring. If you know, in Richmond they build these places for all of the people that came this way to live.

Dunning: The war housing?

Eaton: The war houses, that's right. In the war house you paid thirty-five dollars. It was quite a deal. You had your heat and your rent was paid and your light and gas was paid for thirty-five dollars per month. That was really something. Like I say, all we needed was just a few operational things in the home and all of this was there for us, the bedding, the furniture, which was good enough.

Dunning: Were you able to get right into war housing when you got here?

Eaton: No, we stayed with my friend.

Dunning: Okay, because I know housing was really tight.

Eaton: It was tight, so we stayed with my friend. We shared my friend's place until we were able to get a place of our own, which wasn't easy because there were so many people coming this way. But we qualified for it so we finally got a place of our own. We went on from there and made it real nice.

Dunning: I'm real curious. When you left Texas to work in the shipyards, did you imagine that you would stay here for the rest of your life?

Eaton: No, no. In my mind I didn't know how long there was going to be a shipyard, or how long the war was going to last. But I stayed in the shipyard for Kaiser until the war ended.

New arrivals in Richmond, 1944

EDDIE AND MYRTLE EATON

Eddie Eaton and relatives visiting Richmond from Houston, Texas, 1945.

Myrtle Eaton's family in San Antonio, Texas, 1952. *From left:* aunt Florence Herron, stepfather Edward Mims, mother Evelyn Mims, and grandmother Josephine Williams.

Left: Myrtle Eaton relaxing after her shift as a welder in Richmond's Kaiser Shipyard No. 2, 1944.

Below: Eaton children playing in war housing, Richmond, 1940s.

Above: The Eaton family, late 1950s. Eddie Lee, Margie May, Patricia Ann, and Myrtle Eaton.

Left: Father and son, 1952. Eddie Lee and Eddie Eaton.

Eddie Eaton and son Eddie Lee at the site of the first house he built in Richmond, 1952.

Left: Addie Bailey, mother of Eddie Eaton, 1970.

Below: Eddie Eaton, winner of 1942 Texas Open Golf Tournament For Colored, Richmond 1945.

Expectations of California

Dunning: Did you have any anticipation or expectation about what California was going to be like?

Eaton: I didn't. From what I heard, it was a better place to live than Texas. You were a little more freer in California than you were in Texas. It did prove out that way, but Texas was nice. California was just a little bit better.

Dunning: Did any of your brothers come out here?

Eaton: No. I'm the only one.

Dunning: You're the only one?

Eaton: The only one. My other brothers remained in Houston.

Dunning: That seems unusual, because I've talked to a lot of people that when one person in the family came to California, then five or six others would come out.

Eaton: That's very true, but I was the only one in the family that came this way. So it was just me and me alone in the family that was here, but I had lots of friends.

##

Dunning: What were your first impressions of Richmond?

Eaton: Like I said, the shipyard was here. That's where the majority of the work was, in the shipbuilding. Then my friend, Priscilla, she was here.

Dunning: Had Priscilla come by herself?

Eaton: No, she and her husband came, I think. But later he was, I think, drafted into the army, so she was here alone. She was a good friend of ours in Houston, Texas, and that made it possible for us to come this way and have someone that we knew and someplace we could stop until we made arrangements for ourselves.

Career in the Painters Union

Eaton: We went to Kaiser shipbuilding in Richmond and I joined the Painters Union. I think the pay was $1.20 an hour as the prices went up and up and up. I remained there until the war ended, and then I went from there to Bethlehem Steel, kind of part time. I think it was '48 I went to Bethlehem Steel. I stayed until I retired.

Things were slow, very slow, up and down, up and down, but as we went along things got better and for the last thirty years I think I was off for about maybe four hours.

Dunning: So there was always some work?

Eaton: Always something to do, yes.

Dunning: What was the Painters Union called?

Eaton: The Painters Union is local 961.

Dunning: Were you in that same union for your entire career?

Eaton: No. When I came out I joined Painters local number 560. That was in El Cerrito. That's the one that I joined when I came to Richmond. Then when I went from Richmond to San Francisco to Bethlehem we had to transfer to Painters local 961. We remained there until I retired.

Dunning: I know some of the first unions at the shipyards were segregated. How about Painters local 560?

Eaton: Painters, it wasn't, but you got some good information on that. Some of the locals it was segregated, but the painters, no. It seemed like there was no segregation in the painters. I stopped there and everything worked out so good, but some of the unions were segregated. It was a problem.

Dunning: They had auxiliary unions.

Eaton: You got the news. That's right. That's so true, but the painters weren't that way.

Dunning: Why do you think the Painters Union was different?

Eaton: I don't know why. I can't remember just why the painters wasn't that way, but the welders, burners, and boilermakers, it was problem there. But the painters, no, we didn't have any problem. Everybody got along real well in the painters. If you paint in Kaiser, if you paint, you paint. If you could do a job and you were good at that job you could do that job. We had no problem at all there.

Dunning: Did you start working immediately when you moved to Richmond?

Eaton: Oh, yes. You didn't want to wait one day. You wanted to try to get the ball rolling in the right direction as soon as you could. So I was here probably a day or two and I got with a friend of mine and we went to the union. It was fifty dollars to join the union. I had the fifty dollars so I joined up and right to work I went. I was working within less than a week.

Dunning: What was your first job at the shipyard?

Eaton: Cleaning, preparing for paint. I went with a cleaning group, you know, scraper, sander, preparing the steel to be painted. Later on I went up into painting, but the first thing I did I was cleaning.

Dunning: Which yard?

Eaton: Yard Three. They had the yards numbered one, two, three, four. I was in Yard Three. They built the larger ships, transports. That's where I stopped and that's where I remained until the war was over, and then from there to Bethlehem.

Atmosphere in the Kaiser Shipyards

Dunning: What was the atmosphere of the shipyards?

Eaton: The atmosphere was of people coming from far and near, and from the South. But the people got along real well. You would be surprised.

Dunning: It is kind of surprising when you think that here you have this community, Richmond, that was fairly small before the war, 23,000, and in two years it went to 125,000.

Eaton: But you would be surprised. It was like a dream. Everybody came from the South and everyplace. They came to Richmond and it seemed like a dream that things were happening here that wouldn't exist in other places. It seemed as if they were relatives or something the way they got along. They would go to each other and communicate with each other on the jobs, work together. You'll have problems right now someplaces. You know what I mean. But then it was just like a dream.

Dunning: Do you think it was because everyone was involved in this war effort?

Eaton: You asked a question and that question you asked would be the answer, so that's what it was. That's all it was, people's concern. They said, "We have a struggle and we're going to stand together." That's the way I think everybody saw it. You asked a question and that was the answer also. That was the whole thing, as the old saying goes, in a nutshell.

Governor Earl Warren on School Integration

Eaton: We had Governor--what was his name? I think Governor Earl Warren. He was the governor if I'm not mistaken. There was a lot of people, schools. Yes, the white people, ladies mostly, were saying they weren't going to have their kids going to school with the black kids. He told them, "You traveled out this way. Now you can travel right back. It's not going to be a segregated school, schools that are black and schools that are white." He made that statement and he stood pat on that. In no time at all that was eliminated. They forgot about that and everybody went together and went to school just like kinfolks.

Dunning: Not that there weren't problems, I'm sure.

Eaton: Oh, yes. Problems like right now, problems now. But Governor Warren said there's not going to be a black school and a white school.

Richmond's War Housing

Dunning: I get varying answers in terms of the war housing. Some people say that they were all mixed and some people say that they tried to arrange it so that whites were living in one section and blacks were living in another section.

Eaton: They tried to do that to the best of their ability. They tried to do that but it didn't work. They finally just worked where it was all together. They tried to keep it kind of a segregated thing, but they finally got it together. But they tried that.

What they were thinking, was that that would keep down problems. You know what I mean. It wasn't down South. So they tried to move into that gradually. It worked out real nice. But it did work just as you say. They tried to keep the blacks in an area and the whites in an area, but finally they kind of gelled and went to moving in and around each other and it worked out fine.

You got good information on that. It was something similar to that, but it finally worked out where they were all together and everything went along quite smooth.

But the school is one thing that the white women, mostly, were saying, "No, my child is too good. I won't do it with the black."

But I think it was Earl Warren who was governor then if I'm not mistaken, and he said, "No. It's not going to be segregated schools."

Dunning: When you mention the white women, were they women that also came from the South?

Eaton: They came from the South, yes.

Dunning: It's interesting. I've been interviewing some people that lived here before the war when Richmond was small and there were only something like fifteen black families in the population.

Eaton: There weren't too many. That's right.

Dunning: I kept hearing stories about how, before the war, everyone went to school together, the Asians, the blacks, and the Hispanics, and there was no problem. I heard that from a white person, and I didn't know whether they were just kind of glossing it over. But I've met some of the black people that lived here and they said that that was the case. They didn't really have any problems of extreme discrimination until there was this huge influx during the war and then their lives really changed.

Eaton: That's right. I understand that they got along real fine around Richmond. The people that were there, they got along real fine. But when the people moved in from the South, that's when it started. That's when the problems started. They tried to keep it as the South was. After a while they saw it wasn't working so it seemed they kind of got together.

But you heard just right. When the people moved from the South this way, they tried to make a change and they couldn't make that change and it just created a little problem for a while, but then it kind of tapered off. So that was all. You heard right. That's the way it was.

Schedule at the Shipyards

Dunning: Getting back to your job at the shipyard, did you have a daily schedule? I know most people had to punch a clock when they came in.

Eaton: Oh, yes. We had a daily schedule, yes. We would go in and punch a card in the morning and punch out at night.

Dunning: What shift were you on?

Eaton: Day shift. I worked day shift most of my life. Most of my lifetime. I liked the day shift.

Dunning: Was it seven to three, or--?

Eaton: It was eight to four thirty, with thirty minutes for lunch. This is what I said, "Work while it's day, for when night comes no man can work." I tried to do my work in the daytime and figured I should be some other place at nighttime.

I've done some work at nighttime, but I prefer day work all my life. Ninety-five percent of the work I've done since I've been in the state here, the forty-three years I've been here, have been the daytime. I worked some nights just to make ends meet.

Dunning: It seems with painting you really need the daylight.

Eaton: Daylight, yes, but with good lighting, you can make it at night. But daytime is the time to work. That's what I always say. I admire the daytime, prefer the daytime other than the nighttime for working.

Dunning: Which war housing did you live in?

Eaton: The Terrace, the area called the Terrace.

Dunning: Where was that?

Eaton: That was up not too far from the shipyard. You could even walk to the shipyard. It was about half a mile from Yard Three where I worked at. It was up in the Point Richmond area.

Dunning: Down by the Canal Boulevard area?

Eaton: There you go. Right in there we were, on Canal Boulevard. When you leave Cutting and turn left, you go about six blocks and turn right. We called it Terrace Apartments.

Brickyard Landing

Dunning: Right over near where the Brickyard Cove is going now.

Eaton: That's right. Isn't that something? Have you been over there?

Dunning: I can't believe it.

Eaton: Isn't that something. It just looks like up against the wall. I don't know what. I wouldn't want to live there myself, but it's really something the way they put those homes in that area.

Dunning: It's pretty unnatural, I think. It looks like it's just bursting out of the mountain.

Eaton: You see that? Burst out of the mountain. That's good, what you said. Just burst out of the mountain. When you go there it is just really something. We drive by sometimes and just look, just view and see how things are going. They have a lot of signs. Sold, sold, sold, sold. You know what I mean. I think that

Eaton: they're trying to pull somebody's leg. They can have them. Like you said, they seem like they're just something that's burst out of the mountain. That's a good way to describe it.

Dunning: I was pretty shocked a couple of years ago when they were starting. It probably wasn't even that long ago. It was about a year ago. It's pretty isolated there.

Eaton: But now they did something that I knew they were going to do. I said there was no way that they could have all these places back here without two ways to go in: water and the tunnel. Now there are three ways. I knew that there was going to be some ways and means that they getting out of there other than that way. Now they're putting a road over the mountain.

Dunning: Right. In fact, I've walked up there.

Eaton: You have? Over the mountain to Canal Boulevard and come down?

Dunning: Yes. I haven't come down Canal because I've usually parked up near Brickyard Landing.

Eaton: Yes. That's going to make it real nice. It's kind of a boulevard, like you go out and then you come in. It's going to be real nice. I knew they would do this, and so they did. All those homes back there, they were going to have to do something. All those people coming through that tube [Garrard Tunnel] would be too much.

Dunning: No way could all that traffic go through the tunnel.

Eaton: No. Then quite a few of the residents use their boats. Well, when the water is rough they can't use the boats. When they have those high tides and the winds blowing and storming they can't use their yachts to go across the bay, so it's just the tube. But now they have--which I knew they were going to do--they come over the

Eaton: mountain now to Canal. That's going to make it real nice. Other than that, though, you're trapped. There's a trap back there behind the mountain.

Wartime Transportation

Dunning: How did you get around when you first arived in Richmond?

Eaton: Bus, mostly. For a short while I bought an old model car, an old model 1934 Ford. It ran just like new.

Dunning: Did you buy it right in Richmond?

Eaton: Right in Richmond, yes. A '34 Ford. In wartime you had to have the stamps to get the automobile tires, stamps to--

Dunning: To get gas.

Eaton: --to get gasoline. Yes. You heard about it. You was real young at the time, real young.

Dunning: I didn't exist.

Eaton: No, you weren't young, you weren't born, no indeed. So that's what happened. I bought an old 1934 Ford, the same type that Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker used in the gangster days, the same type four-door. The car ran so good, and we drove it a while. Later I bought a '41 Ford. I always kept myself with some kind of a transportation.

Dunning: How soon were you able to buy a car?

Eaton: It wasn't too long. It was probably three months after I was here.

Dunning: Had you saved that much money?

Eaton: Well, I had a little money when I came in. I brought a little money here to the state. Not much. In that time a little car like that cost $150, $200. You could get an old car like that for about $200. I think I payed about $200 there.

Dunning: It's hard to believe.

Eaton: It was old but it was a very good car. It was very good transportation. It made it so nice to have some ways to get around, like going to the grocery store. Now with a car, why we'd drive to San Francisco, a place we had never been, or to Berkeley. We'd just drive and see the country. So we just started right off having a good time. With some ways and means of transportation we had a good time. I've had a lot of fun. A lot of people came to California. They moved from Richmond to San Francisco, Berkeley, Sacramento, Stockton, and they just moved around. I came here in 1943 and I've been right here ever since.

Staying in Richmond

Dunning: Why do you think you stayed here?

Eaton: Well, I like it here. After I traveled around to some of the other places, they would be so congested, like San Francisco. I wouldn't want to live there. I've traveled around to all the many different cities, and I just said Richmond was the place for me. I just stayed right here. I know Richmond at one time was a small place. It wasn't a big name. It wasn't on the map at one time. But I hung right with Richmond and I've been here from the year '43 up until right now, '86. I've been here forty-three years.

Dunning: Did your family back in Texas ever try to convince you to go back to Texas?

Eaton: They talked to me quite a bit and said, "Things are good here. When are you coming home?" When in your family someone leaves like that, they're concerned about you, wondering if you're going to be all right, and how are conditions and all. I had to talk to them often and explain to them that everything was all right, and the money I was making here was greater than the money I was making there. I'd tell them how the conditions were, and how the people were getting along. They finally just gave up on it.

Dunning: Did you know pretty soon after you got here that you were going to stay? Did you have that feeling?

Eaton: It wasn't too long after I was here that I said, "I'm home. I found home."

Dunning: You too? It happens to a lot of us.

Eaton: Yes, I said I found a home. It wasn't too long after I was here for me to make that decision that this was the place I was going to try to call home the remainder of my life. I had been all around. I had been in New York, Chicago, just name it, and Texas and Louisiana, and in and around. I've seen the way that people live and I see you have to live someplace, and the climate, and I said, "This is it. I'm at home here."

Dunning: How about your wife?

Eaton: She think the same way.

Dunning: Did she work in the shipyards?

Eaton: She worked shipyard, yes.

Dunning: I might have to get her on tape sometime.

Eaton: Yes, she worked on shipyard. She worked as a welder. When she was working, when she came out she thought, "Oh boy, this was it." Things were so much different. She finally went to making $1.20 an hour for the welding. For the gentleman welding she made $1.20, and that was big dough. It was $9.60 a day here. Big deal. Yes, that was really something.

We weren't married when we came out here. Like I said, we were sweethearts in Texas, so we came here just lovers. But we were married within the first year we were here. We went to Reno and married. We have remained married ever since and have been married about forty-three years now.

Dunning: That's something to be proud of.

Eaton: Yes, it is. And we have three children.

Dunning: How old are your children?

Eaton: They're thirty-eight, thirty-nine, and forty.

Dunning: Thirty-eight, thirty-nine, and forty?

Eaton: Yes.

Dunning: Boom, boom, boom.

Eaton: Boom, boom, boom. Yes, one born in '45, one born in '46, one born in '47. We started and we just kept it going, and then shut it off. The boy is oldest and the girl, she's a principal in Hayward, a school there. The other daughter is teaching in Oakland, and the boy, he's a painter. They get along quite well.

Closing Remarks: First Session

Dunning: It's almost noon, so I think I will stop for now, but I would really like to meet with you for one more session and talk about what happened after the war and some of your recollections about Richmond, because we don't have a whole lot of information about that.

Richmond was designated as an all-American city in the fifties and then there really was a big decline. Downtown was devastated and I know a lot of people really felt that loss. I would like to talk about a lot of those issues. Then if there is anything that you think is real important that should be documented about Richmond, whether it's a special individual or a certain event that happened, something that you think should be remembered. You can be thinking about that.

Eaton: All right. I'll be sure to do that.

Dunning: Today's session gave me a good idea of your background.

Eaton: Like I say, if there is anything else I can do or come up with--

Dunning: Just maybe think about certain things, the fifties and the sixties. If you have an idea, jot it down, and we'll both try to remember it. I'll come with questions, too. But I felt this was good. It gave me a chance to know where you were coming from.

Eaton: I know what you mean, where I came from and where I intend to go.

Dunning: Thank you very much.

Eaton: Oh, yes.

##

Postwar Richmond

[Date of Interview: February 20, 1986] ##

Dunning: Last time we covered quite a bit of your family history and also your working in the shipyard. I'm quite interested in those years right after the shipyard closed. I'm wondering, did Richmond change overnight when the Kaiser shipyards left?

Eaton: I would say no, it took time. The people that were working in the shipyards, they all managed to save a little money, most of them. But shortly after the shipyards closed, work kind of fell off and essentially there wasn't too much work around. The people that managed to save a little money, they spent it in time. Things got--well, it was kind of sad for a while a year or so after the shipyard went down. Some of the people, I think they even had the option of going back home with seven, eight, ten year no-return, something like that. They would send them back home, back to their destination they come from.

Dunning: You mean Kaiser would send them back?

Eaton: No.

Dunning: Or they could choose to go back?

Eaton: If they would choose to go back, the county or the city of Richmond would send them back to the area in which they came.

Dunning: Pay for it?

Eaton: Pay for it, yes.

Dunning: Oh, really? That's the first time I heard that.

Eaton: Yes, they would financially send them back to where they came from. That was real sweet. That was real nice.

Dunning: Do you think they were trying to lessen the population?

Eaton: No, that wasn't it. It was just the employment was so bad and they were just trying to do the next best thing. They gave the people that choice. It wasn't any pressure in any way. It was just their choice. Some thought maybe some of them would just prefer doing it this way, and others wouldn't. But if some would prefer that that was their choice.

Dunning: Of the people that you became friendly with during those war years, did many of them go back home?

Eaton: No, I don't think too many went back. Very few went back, if any, because jobs managed to break for the better and then begin to kind of roll along and roll in the right direction again. I think very few went back.

Dunning: I've heard some stories where people would go back to the South or Midwest, but then they would come back with the rest of their family.

Eaton: Yes, this happened. But some of them went back to stay. They figured that things were better there than they were here. Very, very few, though, very few of them. They went back and I think a few stayed. But then like you say, some of the people would go back with the intention to make it their home again, but then they would change their mind and they would bring the remainder of their family out and live, and did. Many people did this.

Dunning: I'm curious about your connection. Did you meet many people that lived in Richmond before the war? Did you strike up an acquaintance with them? I'm just wondering if you mixed with the people, old-time Richmond residents.

Eaton: Oh, we got along fine, beautiful. Yes, the home I built over on Forty-first Street, I built this home near Mr. and Mrs. Hanes. They had been here all their lifetime. They were an old white family, but they were just as nice as they could be. We got along beautiful. We would talk all the time and we were just beautiful neighbors.

Then there was another family there that lived next door to me, so the people that were here, when I would meet them we would talk and we just had a good time. We would talk about the days gone by and we just had a beautiful time. But Mr. and Mrs. Hanes, I can't forget them, they were so nice. I have an old straight razor he gave me. The one that you shave with. He gave me it and I still have it, just for a souvenir. But I got along real fine and I managed to meet quite a few of the people that had been here for years. They were just beautiful people.

Dunning: I know for some of the early residents, it was overwhelming for them to have a new population. It was difficult and I know from some I talked to they didn't really get to know the newcomers. They said the shipyard workers kind of stayed together. You know, the black shipyard workers would stay together, the southern whites would stay together, and then the old-time Richmond residents would be off by themselves.

Eaton: I know what you mean. In other words it was kind of a three-way situation.

Dunning: Yes, it wasn't a real mix. But you experienced it a little differently?

Eaton: Yes, I experienced it different and I seem to have gotten along with them very well. We would meet downtown in the supermarkets and places and we would just have a good time exchanging conversation with each other. We would have a good time. That's the way I saw it.

Support of Friends

Dunning: Who were your best friends when you came here? I remember you knew Priscilla.

Eaton: Yes, Priscilla. I knew her in Houston, in Texas. She was in Richmond. That's the way we managed to get established, by Priscilla, because we stopped with her for a while. Without Priscilla we wouldn't have known just which way to go or the ways and means to get a place to live. Priscilla was one of the main ones that caused us to manage to stop in Richmond and remain here.

I have friends. King is one of my good friends. He was born in Fresno, California. He was up here so I met him in '43. He was just one of the main ones to help and to advise me about things maybe that I didn't quite know about because he had been in California all his life. But he was down south, and then he came up this way when the shipyards opened up.

Dunning: Do you remember any of his advice?

Eaton: Well, we just talked. He was a little bit older than I was, but we just talked about the job because he knew more about the job than I did. He just gave me advice about the job. That's about all. Other than that, just everyday life. I think I knew just about as much as he did. But it was just the job and how to go about and around the job. Like I said, he was here, and the people from the South, and he seemed to have gotten along with them just like they had been here all the time.

Dunning: You mentioned that he was from Fresno, but had he lived in Richmond before?

Eaton: No.

Dunning: Okay. He came from Fresno to work in the shipyards?

Eaton: In the shipyards, that's right. He became one of the bosses for Kaiser. Yes, he became one of the bosses for Kaiser in 1943 or '44. Why, we're going out to dinner tomorrow night. We're still friends.

Dunning: So he's an old-time friend.

Eaton: Old-time friends, yes, for about forty-three years. I met him in '43 and it's '86 now. So we've been friends for forty-three years. He thinks a lot of me and I think the same of him. I know people through the years, he's always had quite a bit of money, but I don't remember using one dime of his money for anything, like lend me five dollars, or ten dollars, or twenty dollars. You know what I mean. I never used one dime of his money in my lifetime.

Dunning: That's probably one reason you're still friends. Money didn't come in between.

Eaton: But he's just a fellow--money, he would do anything to lean over backwards to help a friend, but it was just something that I never did like to do, to borrow or use anyone else's money. I just tried to have my own. But we got along real fine.

I know we would go out to parties in the late forties. We would go out and he was the type of guy that would want to pick up all the tab, a $35 or $40 tab. I remember one night I said, "Now if you pick this tab up I'm going to cut you. I've got my pocketknife and I'm going to cut your hand off. Now keep your hand in your pocket. We're together and I'm going to share my part of the expenses. Every time I go out you seem to want to pay all the tab." But I said, "I don't like it like that so now when we go out, we're together."

Eaton: He kind of saw it that way and so that's the way we did it through the years. We were in San Francisco to lunch about a month ago. We're going out tomorrow night now. Everything's on me. That's the way we do it now and that's the way I like for it to be and it seems like it works real nice.

Social Life During World War II and After

Dunning: I'm curious about what you did for your social life both during the war and after, what you would do for entertainment.

Eaton: Well, I loved to go to church. The church takes quite a bit of my time. We would go out to dinner. We loved to go riding. We would go up to Reno for a trip, Las Vegas. Play golf, fish, just have things like that, and then try to keep the place looking halfway decent.

Dunning: During those war years did you have time to socialize?

Eaton: Yes, like going to church and we would find a place to go fishing in the little spare time. Then a little light travel. We would take little short trips. Like I said, we were working sometimes six days a week and we wouldn't have too much time, but the time we had we would go to church and fishing. We had no property, no place to keep up then, no place to maintain because we were living in the war projects. We would find things to do, like travel. On Sundays we would go to San Francisco and other places, and just do things to kind of amuse ourselves.

North Richmond Baptist Church

Dunning: Was there a church that you got involved in immediately, that was already established.

Eaton: Oh, yes, it was already established. North Richmond Baptist Church. North Richmond Baptist Church is a church that's been around for a long time. That church, I started going there, and from that church I visited other churches that were in the area until I joined where I'm at now. I've been an usher there for eight years.

Dunning: At where?

Eaton: St. John Missionary Baptist Church. But I visited all the churches up until that time. Then, like I said, I played golf. That took a lot of my time. Then we would find someplace to go fishing and we would go fishing, and we would travel.

Dunning: Would you go fishing in the Richmond area?

Eaton: We would go up around Sacramento in the sloughs and places like that. There wasn't too much fishing in Richmond, just the bay fishing. But we would find someplace to go and we would have pretty good luck lots of times.

Local Blues Clubs

Dunning: How about clubs? I know a lot of music clubs and dance places opened during those war years on San Pablo Avenue and also on Macdonald. Are there any that you can tell me about, any that you would go to?

Eaton: We would go to a place they called North Richmond, which was a place that they would go to for entertainment. Mostly North Richmond, and then we would go to Berkeley to a place they called--what's the name of that place? I can't think of the name of it now. But in Oakland we would go to Slim Jenkins. There were several nice places that we could go to for enjoyment.

Dunning: What kind of music?

Eaton: Well, they had live music. Sometimes, they'd be three or four in the little combo, the little band. It was live music but it was very good.

Dunning: I know those war years, from what I've been told, that's when blues music really came into the Bay Area, particularly in Richmond.

Eaton: That's right. Well, the blues were the thing of the day. You go back and you hear those down home blues, you know. Boy, they would start those blues and we would get to rocking, looking like it was a tornado. Everybody would get to having a good time. But the blues, yes. The blues, that was really what was happening at that time in those years. It kind of went right on.

The blues as of today they are still here, like B. B. King, he plays the blues and everybody loves his music. The blues are still going over big in places, but they've kind of rearranged it and it has other types of music now to go along with it so it just makes it nice.

But we would have a good time with the live music or the jukebox, and we would just have a good time. Or it would be just something to amuse ourselves and to go along with life, keep things from being so dull. But

Eaton: we had a good time. I enjoyed it from the time I arrived at Richmond until today, and I'm still having a good time.

Dunning: Well, you have a positive attitude.

Eaton: Yes, well that's just the way it is. It's a very true statement. Like I say, I've traveled all over in Berkeley, Oakland, just name it, San Francisco, and Walnut Creek, Concord. Just name the areas. I stopped here and I went to many cities, but this is home. I decided I would stay right here. Moving around, I stopped here and I've been here ever since. I plan to remain here.

Membership in Organizations

Dunning: Have you belonged to any organizations in Richmond?

Eaton: I'm Masonic, you know.

Dunning: You are? Since when?

Eaton: I've been Masonic for twenty years. I said, I was baptized in Houston when I was about nine, so I've kind of had my mind on going the right direction practically all my life.

Dunning: Did you ever join the NAACP in Richmond?

Eaton: I never did join it but I always contributed to the cause.

Dunning: I've spoken to one older man, a southerner, who came to California about ten years before the war. In the early forties, he came to Richmond and was organizing

Dunning: the NAACP and he found that there was a real resistance from a lot of southern blacks who didn't want to join the NAACP.

Eaton: I didn't have any objection of the NAACP, but as far as joining I never did join with them, but I always had a stretched out hand to help in any way, to make contributions. But as far as becoming a member I never did become a member for some reason. I don't know.

Dunning: Have you ever thought about that at all?

Eaton: I thought about it, but I said, "Well, being a member, why when I can just contribute to the cause and I won't have to obligate myself in any way." I would just contribute to the cause. When the time came, the need to, I contributed and would just go along like that. But as far as becoming a member I never did, no.

Dunning: Have you been involved in politics at all in Richmond?

Eaton: Yes and no. Congressman George Miller, he depends on me to help him in every way and Mayor Bradley of Los Angeles. And George Livingston, the mayor of Richmond now, I helped when he came up to run for office. That's about all.

Dunning: What kind of help?

Eaton: Just get around and campaign in a sense in the campaign situation.

Richmond Police Force

Dunning: Are there any political figures in Richmond that have impressed you, that you've either liked or disliked?

Eaton: Well, I can say, just thinking, really no. No. I seem to have been able to go along with Richmond. About the police--there's got to be police. Here's people. If the police don't hold up for hisself and what he's out there for, the people, the citizens, and the wrongdoers will whip him. They will take his gun and just whip him, so he's got to work for himself.

No, I haven't found too much wrong with Richmond myself. No, and I've been here for quite a while. I've seen lots of things go up and down and around, but I can say I've never seen anything that I was too much against since I've been here. There's a few things that haven't gone true to form, but that's going to happen. Things went along quite smoothly.

First Black Family in the Neighborhood, 1956

Dunning: Have you lived in this particular neighborhood most of the time? [Thirty-seventh Street and Center]

Eaton: I've been right here thirty years, in this one spot thirty years. I was over there not too far. I was about six or seven blocks from here. So I've been right in this area for quite some time. I think it's a nice place and a nice area to live. Neighbors are not going to be like angels. You're going to have your [troublemakers]--but as far as just having problems, I never had trouble. I got along and seemed to have gotten along with everybody and everybody seems to have gotten along with me through the years and we've made it real nice.

There was quite a few whites around but they moved on as the time went by from the time I moved here. I was the first black that moved into this area.

Dunning: I was going to ask you how you've seen the neighborhood change. You were one of the first black families? Or the first black family?

Eaton: I was the first black on this corner right here. This, as you see, is one of the nicer houses of the area. It is one of the MacGregor type homes and it's one of the nicer type homes in the area. When I moved here--I know there's one fellow I used to pass all the time. It was a white family. They wouldn't speak. I was here three weeks and bought a brand new Buick Super. I was in the house three weeks, and the neighbors--well, there was jealousy.

Mr. Burnett was here. He said, "Why, a new house, and in three weeks a new car." They went to talking that kind of talk.

Then I had my golf clubs, something that was kind of a rare thing. There wasn't too many people playing golf at that time. I was hitting golf balls on my lawn. A few of the neighbors would pass and they would look and they wouldn't speak.

It was kind of funny for about a year or so. After that time it seemed like everything began to kind of gel. But the few whites that are remaining, the fireman right across from me, and Lynnhard and the rest of them, we seem to get along fine. Lewis and Lynnhard, we seem to get along real fine, no problem at all. As I say, it's just a very few of the whites that were here who remain.

Dunning: When did the white families start moving out?

Eaton: About a year, I guess, after we moved in.

Dunning: You moved in in the mid-1950s?

Eaton: I moved here in '56. It was around a year or so, maybe a couple or three years. Then one would stray away, and then another and another, and it's down to about I think we have two white families remaining. Everybody else is gone. But the other people that have moved in are real nice.

Dunning: I asked you about some of the changes in your neighborhood, and you said that starting from about a year after you moved in in the late fifties, you began to see a transition in the neighborhood.

Eaton: Yes, in the late fifties. I would say maybe about a year. It might have been in the late fifties or early sixties they began to kind of stray away. Maybe in about three or four years, yes. Maybe one or two at a time, so it's down to about two white families now. But these two I think are going to remain.

Tactics of Real Estate Brokers

Dunning: Do you think real estate people had something to do with that?

Eaton: It could have been. As you've heard through the years--I've heard this. But as you've seen, when a black family moves into a white area, the real estate people will get you to sell--the business gets real good in that area. Selling and buying. The people who move out have got to buy a home, and then the one that they move out of is going to be for sale, so it just makes good business. It makes nothing but good business. When a black moves into a white area, most of the time it makes good business.

Dunning: How did you find this house in this neighborhood?

Eaton: Let me see now. I passed the for sale sign. I checked it out. One of the real estate guys told me, "We want quite a bit of money for that house. I don't know whether you qualify."

I said, "Well, let me take care of that. What is the place worth? What are you asking for it? We'll go from there."

They told me. I had about probably three or four times that amount. I could have paid cash for it if I had wanted to. But I gave them a tremendous down payment and in just a short while the place was mine. He was thinking that I probably didn't have the money that they wanted to own this place. So like I said, I had so much money. The money he asked me to put down on the place, I had probably four times that, I think. He got busy and in no time at all the deal was over and I was here.

Like I say, when I moved here the painting was blues and greens and pinks in every room. I painted every inch of the place and wall-to-wall carpeted it and just done it over. The fellow that I bought it from, he came by and looked and he said, "Wow. You're painting."

But I had to paint. The rooms were just like a circus or something, pink, green, blue. I said, "My goodness." I just went through and cleaned everything and just painted everything, painted from top to bottom. He came by and he was just amazed to think of my moving into a place and going to all that extra expense and time.

Dunning: Were there certain neighborhoods that you absolutely couldn't live in in Richmond?

Eaton: No, I don't think so. San Pablo was always a very funny town. San Pablo, but as far as Richmond, I've

Eaton: never known any place in Richmond that they really object to you living. I don't know of any place in Richmond that they would say no. No, if you were qualified and your finances were right, I think you could live practically any place. If there was a place that they objected to your living in in Richmond, I never knew about it.

Dunning: Well, one person I talked to, he had actually put a down payment on a house in one area, and then there was a restricted covenant which meant that certain groups couldn't live there. He ended up not moving into the house. He did get his down payment back, but it was after quite a battle.

Eaton: Is that right? Well, like I said, this place right here, it was they say, a white area. It was white, lily white. Everything was white. There wasn't a black around the area. I stopped here. I'm just speaking for myself. If there was a problem, why wouldn't this have been a problem. White, white, white, just name it, and I moved right here in one of the nicest homes in the area. So why didn't somebody say, "No." right away?

Nobody ran across on my lawn or shot my windows out at night or anything along that time. That's why I can say you don't know. If they were going to kick up their heels or make a stink of it, why didn't they do it with me? I was the first black to move in the area and there was nothing but white in the area. That's why I'm saying no.

Dunning: In your expereince.

Eaton: That's right. I can just speak for myself, you know. Looking around, I've actually never heard of any problem in Richmond, but San Pablo, yes.

Dunning: San Pablo has kind of a redneck reputation.

Eaton: Yes. That's what I'm saying. But Richmond, no. I can speak for Richmond no problem at all.

Richmond's Image

Dunning: What do you think of Richmond's image?

Eaton: Well, I think Richmond is a city. It hasn't been really talked about a lot, but I think Richmond is one of the finest cities that's in and around California.

##

Eaton: Yes, I've been here for quite a while and I've had time to observe many things in Richmond. I've been over not every inch of Richmond, but I've been over Richmond. In forty-three years I've traveled, and Richmond is my city. That's just the way I see it. I'm pleased with it.

Dunning: What about outsiders' image of Richmond? Sometimes you say you're from Richmond and people just think of the violence and some of the problems with the police. It doesn't really have a good reputation. It has a strong reputation but it doesn't really have a good one in the Bay Area, and I've wondered, as someone who has lived here for so many years how that has affected you.

Eaton: I'll tell you what. Like I mentioned about the police, there's got to be police. Some funny things have gone on here. But I have seen it that way in every city. Think about it. In Oakland, they'll whip you to death in Oakland. Berkeley, just name it. So why put down Richmond?

Dunning: Why do you think Richmond has the bad reputation?

Eaton: I don't know why Richmond should have the bad reputation. Look at Oakland. Oakland is right next door to us. Well, there's a few cities between us, but you take Oakland, and San Pablo is right next door. In Richmond these things happen, and in every city. They happen in every city. Just name the cities and you'll find the same. San Francisco. They'll do you in San Francisco.

It happens in every city. Oakland, those boys will whip you to death over there sometime. They'll kill. So what are you saying? Richmond here, big deal. Richmond, Richmond, yes, but the things that happen in Richmond, they happen in all cities. So I don't see why actually there should be too much more said about things in Richmond. That's the way I see it.

Dunning: If you had to think of Richmond's best period since you've been here in '43, is there any time period that you think Richmond really was at its height?

Eaton: You know, I've seen Richmond just Richmond and I've lived here for some time. In Richmond you got to do your thing day by day. I haven't seen anything at any period of time that's made a big change in the time I've been here. No. No, it just seems like Richmond has been moving forward.

I know the population fell off real bad one time. Behind the shipyard days the population fell off and there was concern about that. People were going to other areas, trying to make it, because in Richmond the work fell off. The population went down, but now it's kind of coming back again. That's something that didn't alarm me too much.

I can't see a thing that I can say. Richmond seems to be kind of rolling along in the right direction from the time I've been here up until now. A

Eaton: few little things, but like I say, the things that happen here, they happen in all cities. I can't see a thing about it myself, no.

Hard Times in Richmond

Dunning: I want to ask you the reverse of the best times in Richmond. Was there a worst time or a very difficult period in Richmond's history?

Eaton: Oh, yes. Now we can go back to the fifties. As I say, behind the war. When the war was over in the late forties, and early fifties things were sad. I can see what you mean. Things were kind of sad here. Employment was down and things weren't the best. No, it wasn't the best through those years. But the Vietnam War came into the picture and things began to look up again. From that time on it has been moving, it looks like in the right direction.

Dunning: I know there was quite a bit of turbulence throughout the nation in the 1960s, but specifically in Richmond, too, there was some problem with shootings downtown. Do you recall that time period?

Eaton: I do. I recall the times and very much so. But it was something that happened and, well, the heads seem to have gotten together and handled it, I think very well. I didn't worry about it too much because it seemed like it was being handled just about as well as it could be handled. The thing had happened and was happening. They were fighting and were working with it. They seem to be doing a good job of ironing the problems out, so I just kind of hung loose and just waited and watched the tide go by. It seemed like it worked out. Right

Eaton: now it seems like it's rolling in the right direction. Everything seems to be rolling quite smoothly right now.

Dunning: It sounds like you kind of go with the flow.

Eaton: Well, that's the way. I watch things and I say, "Well, what can you say? These things have happened and look like they are being corrected. At the very best that's the ways and means that can be done, so what can you say?"

Improvements For The City

Dunning: If you could improve Richmond in any way, would you have any ideas along those lines?

Eaton: Right now, I can say I can't think of anything that I could say or do to improve the city. It seems like everything is rolling about as smooth as they roll in any city right now. So I can't see any improvements that could be made. There's always improvements to be made. There's always something you could do, but what can you say? The money is being appropriated for different things about the city, so this is being done the very best that they can. Nothing that I see that I could do to make any more improvements than are being made at the present.

Dunning: What about the downtown area? When did that really start changing?

Eaton: To pinpoint a year, I couldn't say, but that started downgrading and that was kind of sad. They moved Richmond up on Hilltop and places and right downtown went down.

Eaton: Macdonald Avenue, that's one thing about the street. If I had anything to do with that Macdonald Avenue down from Twenty-third on down through that area, I would have done different from what they did. It's so narrow. That's something that I didn't like at all about the move they made there, that street.

And they have a bunch of lights on the side right close together. All those light weren't necessary. That's one thing that I didn't like at all. I would have done it another way if I had had anything to do with the street, Macdonald. They made a boulevard, but going east and west is so narrow. A car parked on the side, and two cars can't pass. A street like that should be much wider, at least be able to get through easier with two cars and a car parked.

The Iron Triangle

Dunning: Like Barrett?

Eaton: There you go. That's right. But that Macdonald, that was pitiful. I don't know who came up with that idea, but that was a pitiful idea. Another thing about Richmond, the Iron Triangle, going as you're going to North Richmond.

Dunning: The Iron Triangle?

Eaton: Yes. They're building some little huts out there. I don't know who designed those, but whoever designed those needs to go back to the drawing board and come back again. They started them and now they've covered them all up. Something happened. I don't know if they ran out of money or just what happened.

Dunning: I had read that there was something in the building materials--the stucco--that wasn't up to standards, and then they needed a whole lot more money to improve it.

Eaton: Oh, it's pitiful. Have you seen it?

Dunning: I've seen it, yes.

Eaton: It looks like it is just some places they're building to push a bunch of animals in there or something. They're close together. It's just pitiful. You've seen it haven't you? It's a shame, I'm telling you. And now they're putting some kind of plastic all around them to seem like just preserve them for a later day. It seems like they ran out of gas, money, or something. They ran out and I don't know just what happened. But something happened and they just said, "Well, we'll shut everything off right here. We'll tie them up and cover them up for a later day."

It's just pitiful. Somebody pulled a boo-boo. If you pass through tonight you'll see it. They've got some canvas around them to preserve them for some reason. There's no telling how long they'll be there. Just think of the money and the time that has been spent to get them where they're at there now. That was poor, poor, poor. Somebody pulled a boo-boo there. Things like that, like I say, it's that and Macdonald Street. There's probably some things maybe that I overlooked, but those are two of the things I see in Richmond that are bad, bad, very bad.

Dunning: A number of people that I talked to, the thing that upset them the most is not having a downtown. They have to go to El Cerrito or San Pablo Avenue to do their shopping. Does that bother you?

Eaton: No, it doesn't bother me at all because we have supermarkets.

Dunning: I guess you're closer. You're closer to San Pablo Avenue.

Eaton: San Pablo is not too far down the street there, but we have supermarkets right here on San Pablo, Lucky's and Safeway. We have a car. It's just a nice little jump, a few minutes there and back. If we're going to buy clothes or anything like that, there's Hilltop. Most of the time we go to Rochesters in San Francisco just for a drive over there. I'm big and tall, so I buy my clothes big and tall, most of them. My wife, she would go to Hilltop. So we don't mind it. It's a nice little drive.

We haven't missed a thing, no. We haven't missed a thing because downtown Richmond was fine, very fine. We would love to have seen it remain, but as it didn't, we just haven't even thought about it.

Advice Passed On To Children

Dunning: Do your children ask you questions about your history?

Eaton: Oh, yes. They did through the years. We would talk about it just as I talk to you. I explained to them about the way I came up from a child. I did this more than once through the years, but right now they know about it so I don't say things about it now because they've asked me and I've told them, explained my life to them from a child up to now. They treasured it and admired the things that I did and the way I live.

My wife told them that she would love for the teenagers of today to see the way I operated when I was a teenager in the early 1920s. I had my own car and money. Like I say, before I went to the army I had this Packard convertible and I was just really rolling

Eaton: high as a youngster. She said she wished the youngsters today would see how I operated in my late teens and early twenties at home, and they would actually take pattern on the way that I lived.

I tried to have the things I needed without beating my way through. I told the kids about it more than once so now they know all about the way I lived and did things on the way up, so they don't ask anymore. But they admired the way I did things and they tried to follow suit. Lots of things I did they tried, too.

Dunning: Remember the last time I asked you if there were certain things that your mother tried to hand down to you in terms of values and attitudes? I'm wondering the same with your children. Are there things that you tried to pass on to them?

Eaton: Oh yes, I did. I tried to give them, as my mother did me, good advice about things and anything that I thought could help them in their lifetime. I tried to pass it on to them, tried to keep them from making the mistake and then think about it. I would try to tell them and let them get it into their mind before it happened. I did the best I could towards trying to give them good advice, just as Mother did me.

I think that Mother did a good job. Like I say, up to this point I haven't been in nobody's jail one day. I kind of think quite a bit of that myself. You know what I mean. I know it's just nothing but good advice she gave me through the years. I just took what she gave me and went with it. Don't ever think good advice shouldn't be accepted because it can help you in your lifetime.

Interfaith Marriage: Baptist and Catholic

Dunning: Have your children been involved in the Baptist Church also?

Eaton: This is something kind of a rare thing, I would say. Now, my wife is Catholic. She's Catholic. The kids are Catholic.

Dunning: Was she raised Catholic?

Eaton: She was raised Catholic. She went to Catholic school.

Dunning: That is unusual.

Eaton: Unusual. I never said one time to her or tried to persuade her to become Baptist and she never tried to persuade me to go Catholic. Ain't that something? It's amazing, and nobody can understand it, but we've lived together this long. We've been married forty-three years. She went to Catholic school when she was a child.

Now the kids, well, what can I say? I'm at the golf course and I'm on the job working in places, and she is the one that's going to be taking the kids around to churches and places maybe when I would be working quite a bit overtime. She would be going to church, so why would I object to the kids going to the Catholic Church with her? At this small age they wouldn't be able to take care of themselves so they went to the Catholic Church and joined the Catholic Church, so that's the way it's been. We've gotten along beautiful.

Dunning: So you go over to the Baptist Church by yourself?

Eaton: By myself most of the time. She goes sometimes with me.

Dunning: That is unusual, real unusual.

Eaton: Very unusual. A lot of people can't understand it, but we've gotten along so fine. From the time we've been sweethearts and married. We met when I was eighteen years old. We were sweethearts for about eight years and then came to California and we married the year we came here. Out this way, if something would happen they would say we are together, so we decided we would marry and be as one. We married when we came to California. I never one time persuaded her to join the Baptist Church and she never tried to have me join the Catholic Church. So we got along real fine.

Dunning: Are there any ways that you wanted your childrens' lives to be different from yours, or better, or--?

Eaton: I just wanted them to be able to live a good life and be able to take care of themselves, support themselves, that's all.

Dunning: You mentioned that one of your daughters is a teacher and the other is a principal, so you must have stressed education.

Eaton: Oh yes. And then, as I say, the boy is a painter. All I wanted them is just to be able to support themselves and they seem to be doing that quite well.

Special Ambitions

Dunning: Do you have any special ambitions now, things you would like to do or places you would like to go?

Eaton: No. Like I say, me and my wife, we travel. We make up our mind to go someplace. Like this year we plan on going to Texas for vacation for a couple or three

Eaton: weeks. We've been to Honolulu. We just travel around. We make up our mind to go someplace and we go. Las Vegas, whatever. We just make up our mind and go. I don't think I have in mind to make any plans other than just my usual thing. At vacation time we decide to go wherever.

It seems like it would be very educational to the people of today and the future. I was saying to my wife, I heard it on television this morning. People make the money but they don't know how to manage it and what to do with it. They say so many people have credit cards and they just overdo the thing. They find themselves in nothing but trouble at all times.

Suggestions for the Younger Generation

Eaton: Now, even for youngsters today and in the future, my life worked real well. From seven years old earning my first thirty-five cents up to this day. Everything you see here I own. Automobiles. A $33,000 car in the garage, I paid cash for that. From age seven and thirty-five cents up to this point. That's very educational to the youngsters of today.

It seemed like this [interview] would go into some kind of a little magazine or something like that and that would be worth something to people as of now and the future. I heard this morning, people make their money but they don't know how to manage it or how to distribute the money and they keep themselves in trouble all the time. One lady, she said she had so many problems through the months and years, every time she walked out of the store with something, "You can bet your bottom dollar it will be mine," she said. No more credit cards and things like this.

Eaton: I say again, just read what I've told you. From age seven and thirty-five cents. From that period up until this time, it's just educational to the youngsters that are growing up today, thinking maybe I want to try to do it like this, do it as he did. At age nine there was probably just twenty dollars in the bank, and trying to make a way for myself from seven years old. My life should be very educational to the people as of today and the ones that are coming.

Dunning: People certainly need models.

Eaton: Yes.

Dunning: Did you have any models or heroes, people that you looked up to?

Eaton: Not too many, no. There were a few elder people that I admired--like my grandfather and Uncle George. Other than that, not too many.

All my children, when they were born I opened a savings account for each one of them. Even my little grandchild, when she was three and four, she would go to the bank. She wasn't large enough for the teller to see her, but she would go up to the teller and she would reach her hand up and I would give her the money and I would deposit it in her account. At three years old she would just reach the money up. The teller, she said, "Where's this money coming from?"

I said, "It's my granddaughter."

The lady at the bank, she said, "Mr. Eaton, that's one of the nicest things you've ever done." I was trying to start them off in the right direction from just a youngster. That's what I done with all my kids. Like I say, if the kids of today and of the future would maybe try this, it might help.

Dunning: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Eaton: No, just that the life I live up to this point, trouble I've always shunned that.

Dunning: You've always what?

Eaton: Shunned the trouble. You know what I mean, stayed away from the trouble. I just lived as I told you, from a child up to this point without too many problems. If I made any money I tried to save part of it. One of the things, I think it's a good advice for anyone who is going to try to make it in life.

Dunning: If at a later time anything comes to your mind that you think should be remembered or recorded about Richmond, please feel free to call me because it's easy for me to come over.

Eaton: Yes.

Dunning: I would appreciate that. I really enjoyed meeting you and talking to you.

Eaton: Yes. It's been a pleasure talking with you and trying to help. If I've been a help in any way--it has been a pleasure to have met you and try to explain what I knew and what I could to help you with your program.

Dunning: I hope we both have some luck encouraging Mrs. Eaton to be recorded.

Eaton: We may.

Dunning: Give her a few weeks.

Eaton: Yes, give her a few weeks, she may. But like she says, she hasn't done a lot, so she seems to think that she didn't do enough. But I think you would--[ringing interruption]

Dunning: We were hoping to encourage your wife to participate in the project.

Eaton: The things she did were very important. What she did, ladies would think enough to go into the war effort, an effort trying to help the cause, to weld, to go into those old clothes, jeans and things, and weld, I think it was a very important part that she played. She should feel that the thing that she did was very important, but she sees in her mind that it wasn't too important. But it was.

Dunning: Well, thank you very much. This has been a real pleasure.

Eaton: Yes, it's been a pleasure to have met you and to help in any way that I've been. If it's been appreciated, you're more than welcome.

Dunning: Oh yes. Thank you.

##

End of Interview

Transcriber: David Pollock
Final Typist: Shannon Page

APPENDICES

OTHERS

Lord let me live, from day to day,
In such a self-forgetting way.
That even when I kneel to pray,
My prayer shall be for others.
Help me in all I say and do,
To ever be sincere and true;
And even know that all I do,
Must needs be done for others.
Let self be crucified and slain and buried,
Deep and all in vain.
May efforts be to rise again,
Unless to live for others.
When my work on earth is done,
And my new work in Heaven begun;
May I forget the crown I've won,
While thinking still of others.
Others, Lord, yes others,
Let this my motto be;
Help me to live for others,
That I may live like Thee.

.....Charles Meigs.

+

PALLBEARERS

Lee Roy Potts
J. B. Scales
Herman Robertson Jr.
Elroy Potts
Ocey James Eaton
John Robertson Jr.

+

INTERMENT
Paradise North
Clay & Clay Mortuary, Directing

O B S E Q U I E S

For

MRS. ADDIE BAILEY

SUNDAY, JUNE 25, 1972
1 O'clock P. M.

+

PLEASANT GREEN BAPTIST CHURCH
10304 Needham
Houston, Texas
REV. J. C. NEAL, PASTOR, Officiating

O B I T U A R Y

"Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die:" John 11:26.

In Houston, Texas, August 31, 1887, there was born a baby girl to Mr. and Mrs. Jim Byrd, whom they called Addie.

She was reared in Oates Prairie Community, where she also attended the Public School.

At an early age in life, she confessed Christ and joined the Pleasant Green Baptist Church under the leadership of the Late Rev. Ike Johnson. Here, she remained a faithful member.

During the year of 1904, she met and married Mr. Hunter Eaton, to this union, six children were born. She was a devoted mother, whose truth, integrity and beauty of Spirit is enshrined in her children today.

She departed this life Sunday, June 18, 1972 at 2:45 A. M. at Blalock East. Survivors are: her six children: Mrs. Sarah Eaton Nichols, daughter; Mr. John Eaton, son, Mr. William Eaton, son, Mr. Jesse Eaton, son, Mr. Eddie Eaton, son, Mr. Lester Eaton; three sisters and one brother: Mrs. Clara Gamble, Mrs. Katy Brown, Mrs. Ava Potts, John Byrd; son-in-law, Mr. Vernon Nichols, five daughters-in-law: Mary Eaton, Myrtle Eaton of Richmond, California, Aline Eaton, Wildred Eaton, Odell Eaton: twenty grandchildren, sixteen great grandchildren, four great great grandchildren, many nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

ORDER OF SERVICE

PROCESSIONAL

SONG.....Choir

SCRIPTURE.....

PRAYER.....

EXPRESSIONS.....Neighbors and Friends

RESOLUTIONS.....

ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....Sis. Jessie M. Neal

OBITUARY.....Sis. Norvella North

SOLO.....Sis. Deloris Caldwell

EULOGY.....Rev. J. C. Neal, Pastor

RECESSIONAL

==oOo==

From Gulf Coast Golfer, March 1987.

Pro golfer Jack Selleman who learned his swing from Eddie Eaton when they were fellow caddies in the 1940s.

TIPS FROM PROS

Getting off on the right foot makes the difference, says Jack Selleman

By Bruce Gilmer and Steve Hunter

Golf talent is a terrible thing to waste.

But if you don't learn to play this game properly from the beginning, you could find that the talent you waste is your own.

This is the theory stressed for 30 years by Jack Selleman, resident pro at Houston's Braeburn Country Club. Start early, learn the fundamentals and, above all, get it right the first time.

"A person who's never played golf should never, ever go out there and do something on his own. The first two or three lessons are the most important of your life, and to get into bad habits to start with and then have to break them is just an awfully hard job."

Selleman, 62, has 12 years tenure at Braeburn, where he gives 400 to 500 lessons every year. His teaching career began at Pearland's Golfcrest Country Club in 1957. There, as an amateur member, he convinced the board of directors that he knew more about teaching golf than any pro they could hire.

A native Houstonian, Selleman picked up golf at age 11 caddying for his father at Glenbrook Country Club. He played high school golf at Milby, winning city Medalist honors all three years, and he won the Men's City Amateur Champion trophy three times in the mid-1950s.

He twice claimed low amateur honors in the Houston Open, and tied for third at the Mexico City PGA Tour stop. In '63, he tied for 13th, with a final-round 68, at the PGA Championship, a mark bested only once since by a club pro. Despite these numbers against the best in the business, he never had a desire to play the Tour. As a boy, he saw himself turning pro; but as a teacher, not a Tourist, he explains.

He won the Southern Texas PGA Senior Chapter Championship in '78, '81, '85 and '86, and hopes to add this year's plaque to his wall. His swing is the same today as when he learned it caddying at Texaco Country Club, from fellow caddy Eddie Eaton.

"He told me, 'Boy, you watch how I

A common error is accelerating the club too soon, or "going over the top," demonstrates Selleman.

swing this club, and you swing it just like I do," recalls Selleman. "This is exactly what I've done. I didn't really have any idea what golf was about in those days, and it became natural for me."

Emulation, he explains, is a vital part of instruction. As children are prone to copy others, so are beginning golfers. Finding a proper swing to copy is essential, he asserts, as is getting started with good habits.

This is the thrust of the following discussion, excerpted from a taped interview.

Richmond man restores neglected duplex

Former eyesore becomes an asset

By Kerry Hamill
Staff writer

RICHMOND — The old house was built as solid as a dollar and sat on a thick concrete foundation. It was framed in redwood considered too expensive today to be used routinely.

But after years of neglect, the abandoned 400 South St. duplex was a neighborhood eyesore, said present owner Eddie Eaton. Its exterior paint had peeled and the outside staircase was rotted. Inside, the plumbing and electrical wiring needed redoing.

The house was loaded with potential and it enticed Eaton as a challenging retirement project.

Eaton, a jack-of-all-trades, bought the duplex in 1980 for $22,000. In Richmond, where officials regularly promote neighborhood renovation, Eaton said his efforts to rejuvenate the house were laced with a sense of civic duty.

He pumped approximately $35,000 into the structure and redid it from top to bottom — the plumbing, carpentry, painting and refinishing the original wood. He said the home is now appraised at $115,000 to $120,000, and enhances rather than distracts from the neighborhood.

"The city is now making a nice amount of tax money off of the property," he added.

Eaton worked as a painter in San Francisco's Bethleham Steel shipyard for 33 years. After three years, he became the shipyard's first black supervisor in 1950.

He is a native of Houston, Texas, but moved to Richmond 43 years ago to work for the Kaiser Shipyards in Richmond as a painter.

Eaton learned the intricacies of construction during the 1950s after he built his first home, which sat on a plot now occupied by Kennedy High School on Cutting Boulevard. When the school district bought, then demolished his home, Eaton moved to Center Avenue.

The South Street project was a family affair, said Eaton. His wife Myrtle and three children contributed to the effort. Eaton hired contractors to do some of the plumbing and electrical work, but didmuch of the rest of the work himself.

Eaton said the building should should serve as an example to the rest of the city.

"Everyone in Richmond should upgrade a building," he said.

Staff photo/David Toerge

EDDIE EATON stands in front of the South Street home he rejuvenated.

Judith K. Dunning

Interviewer/Editor Regional Oral History Office since 1982.
Specialty in community and labor history.
Project Director, "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California."

Previous oral history projects: Three Generations of Italian Women in Boston's North End; World War I and II shipyard workers at the Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston; and Textile mill workers in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Photography exhibitions: "Lowell: A Community of Workers," Lowell, MA 1981-1984 (travelling).
Fishermen by Trade: On San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers" Richmond Museum, 1988.

Play: "Boomtown" based on the oral histories of shipyard workers, produced by San Francisco Tale Spinners Theater, 1989.

Member Richmond Arts Commission, 1988-1990.

Currently adapting Richmond community oral histories into large print books for California adult literacy programs.

101169